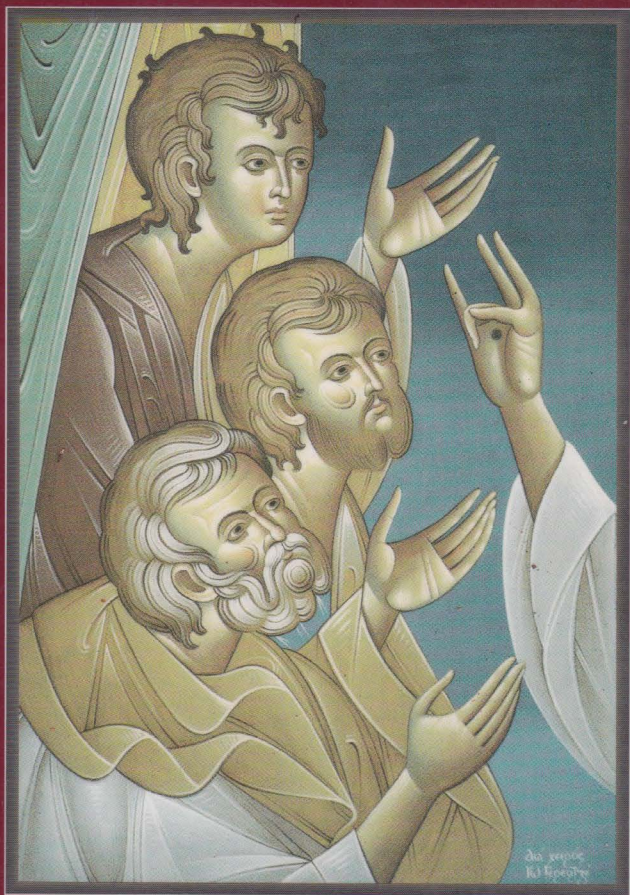


Metropolitan of Nafpaktos
Hierotheos

The person in the Orthodox Tradition



Translated by Esther Williams

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Abbreviations

CWS	Classsics of Western Spirituality. SPCK. London.
DLT	Darton, Longman & Todd. London.
EPE	Ellines Pateres tis Ekklesias, Thessaloniki.
ET	English translation.
FC	Fathers of the Church. Catholic University, Washington DC.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library. William Heinemann, London.
NPNF	A Select Library of Nicene and Poat-Nicene Fathers. T, and T, Clark, Edinburgh.
NPNFns	Ibid. , new series.
PG	Patrologia Graeca, comp. J. P. Migne, Paris.
PIPM	Patriarch Idryma Paterikon Meleton, Thessaloniki.
SC	Sources Chretiennes, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris.
SPCK	Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London.
SVS	St. Vladimir's Seminary



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Translator's Note

The important word 'nous' in Greek has no English equivalent, and to translate it as 'mind' or as 'intellect' fails to indicate that it refers to the inner eye. It is well explained in the third part of chapter 6. We retain the Greek word 'nous' wherever it occurs.

I am grateful to Effie Mavromichali, who has taken time from her full programme of work to check the whole translation with the original Greek. I am also grateful to Bishop Hierotheos and to Abbess Photini and all the sisters at the Birth of the Theotokos Monastery who have published this book, for their friendship, help and encouragement.

Esther Williams

Preface to the English edition

One of the basic problems which has always troubled man's spirit is the question of what man is. Philosophers, theologians, sociologists, psychologists and educators have engaged themselves in this question, since man is the microcosm within the macrocosm, he is the summation of all creation. It is therefore natural that the study of man is closely connected with metaphysical, social, psychological and ecological issues. Everyone who has dealt with the question of what man is has spoken about "man", "the person", "personality", "hypostasis", "the ontology of man", etc. Each one of them has looked at the subject from a different perspective.

The West speculated on these issues. The identification of theology with metaphysics, as attempted mainly in the West during the middle ages, and the disconnection of metaphysics from Science undertaken in the Renaissance resulted in the rejection of metaphysics and, therefore, of theology, which was identified with it. At the same time this brought about an agonized effort on the part of the intellectuals to locate the central characteristic which typifies natural man. Thus various philosophical systems and theories about man were created as for-

mulated in sensationism, rationalism, voluntarism etc. which resulted in Nietzsche's theory about "Superman", followed by the appearance of Sartre's existentialism and the development of postmodernism, which talks about the complexity of relation. Therefore the question of what man is is also contemporary and interesting today.

Beyond the various, important elaborations that have taken place in the Western world on the personhood of man, one can observe that this involvement with the subject is quite a popular one nowadays and has come about after the "ubuses" that were made against the ontology of man-person, since we indeed live in a so called mass-society within which man is considered to be a biological existence, a number. We live in a society where the machine has a primary and great importance and therefore even human relations are mechanised. It is for this reason exactly that the value and ontology of the human person is being researched.

One may also add that two modes of life can be seen nowadays, "individualism", in which the individual holds a central position, and in this case there is no real communion, and "collectivism", in which man becomes part of a mass and loses his freedom. In the first mode, individualism, the person is abolished in the name of freedom. In the second, collectivism, man becomes part of a mass in the name of the unity of society, and so the freedom of the person is abolished.

Within this framework and in the light of contemporary man's search we can see the teaching of the Orthodox Church about man as a person-hypostasis, as formulated by the holy Fathers. Indeed the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church shows that theology is not connected with metaphysics, since Orthodox theolo-

gy is not founded on speculation but on experience and revelation, as Fr. John Romanides has analysed exhaustively in his works.

St. Gregory the Theologian makes some excellent observations on the subject. Man being in the image and likeness of God, can neither be considered a numeric unit nor can become part of a mass.

Thus, in the Orthodox Church, as preserved in parishes and monasteries that, securely, move within the Orthodox framework, both the person and communion among men is vouchsafed, in which case man can neither be enclosed in a barren individualism nor be transformed into part of a mass.

In the book "The Person in the Orthodox Tradition" an attempt has been undertaken for the person to be studied in the light of Orthodox theology, and at certain points in relation to philosophy and man's contemporary searching.

The aim of this book has, of course, been mainly to present the teaching of the holy Fathers about the person and the conclusion is drawn that the person according to Orthodox tradition, is connected in the most part with hypostasis.

This means that ontology is attributed to the person and thus personalism or even psychology and legalism, which see man superficially, are avoided.

Mrs. Esther Williams studied the book in the Greek edition. She lives in the Western world, she has studied philosophy, she has experienced the satiety of the Western tradition and has realised that this book may offer something to the fertilisation of Western thought on the person. Besides, her philosophical knowledge has helped her in the translation of this book and in the use of spe-

cific terms. Ms Effie Mavromichali has helped also in this by checking the translation in relation to the greek text and affirming certain crucial terms, since she knows the terminology which I use very well. I thank the translator who has undertaken the effort for this work deeply as well as her efficient helper in this difficult undertaking. Thanks are also due to Ms Rosslyn Nicholas for her wholehearted support to the translator.

I pray that the reading of this book contributes, even to a short extent, to the awareness of the truth that we are potentially persons and that we should struggle to fulfil the so called hypostatic principle, to become persons in practice, being transformed from glory to glory.

*Written on the 6th of August 1998,
feast of the Transfiguration
of Christ the Saviour.*

Fr. Nektarios K. Agapiou

Prologue to the second edition

With the passage of time it is becoming increasingly clear that concern with the subject of the person is quite timely and essential. All of today's problems about the family, society, ecology, and the world are topics and problems of relationships, among which the integrated man has a central place. This is why books dealing with the subject of the person are timely and essential. To be sure, they may not be causing a stir among the population, but it is they that condition man and his relationships with his surroundings.

After the exhaustion of the first edition of the book "Person and Freedom" I am proceeding to the second edition, entitled "The Person in the Orthodox Tradition". The favourable reception given to the views expressed in the first edition by people who have been the pioneers in this subject, and especially by those who have had a living experience of the person in their own lives, encourages me to proceed to the second edition. I would not like to mention the names of these people for a variety of reasons which I do not feel that I should explain now. Perhaps at another time I will be given an opportunity to write something about this subject.

The second edition relates to two imperative alterations.

The first of these concerns the addition of three new chapters, which are a fruit of further study of this serious subject. The reader can discern that these additions will bring out other aspects of the subject "person-hypostasis" within the patristic perspective. Thus the topic is being filled in, again without my being able to claim that it is completed. And this is because it is a matter of life.

The second alteration has to do with the new title. Instead of "Person and Freedom", which called to mind the two main headings of the first edition, it is entitled "the Person in the Orthodox Tradition". I think that with the doubling of the material, this change was imperative.

The reader will be able to see for himself that the person-hypostasis in the Orthodox Tradition differs distinctly from comparable analyses being made by philosophy and psychology. Unfortunately, today there is confusion on this subject, because some people associate the theology of the hypostasis-person with the philosophical conception of the person, which refers mainly to the rights of the individual, and others confuse it with the psychological analysis of the person, which is identified with the notion of personality and points mainly to the free choices of the 'gnomic' will, the "will of choice".

However, in the Orthodox Tradition the person is closely connected with the "natural will" and is also that which activates and develops the hypostatic principle. Therefore in the tradition of the Church the person is, first and foremost, a topic of theology and asceticism.

Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos

Introduction

The person and freedom are among the greatest concerns of the man of today. This is because he understands very well that it is only when he becomes a real person and attains true freedom that one of the most fundamental existential questions will be resolved and he will attain inner wholeness.

Concern with subjects relating to the person and freedom expresses man's struggle for the life of both person and freedom. It is true to say that it is not a matter of concepts and terms, but of a way of life, of a real life. These terms must never be autonomised, but must express life. This struggle also appears in the fact that unfortunately we understand today that we have ceased to be or to be seen by others as persons, and we have no true freedom. Enslavement to expediency, whether political, social or moral, works to violate personal freedom.

The holy Fathers were concerned with the person and freedom. This was not a philosophical quest, but arose from existential personal problems, mainly as part of their effort to safeguard the right way of life which has been revealed and which leads man to salvation. Thus the Fathers expanded these subjects in many ways beyond what

the philosophers had given and even men of today are offering. For when men today speak of person, they mean something abstract which has no ontological content, and when they speak of freedom they are referring chiefly to a free choice between two things. The holy Fathers, however, gave broader dimensions to these subjects.

In the texts which follow I have attempted to look at the patristic teaching about the person and freedom. I have noted that the holy Fathers gave integrated answers to these subjects, which show that, on the one hand, they have advanced beyond philosophy, and on the other hand, they are associated with asceticism, which marks them as genuine.

Indeed, the holy Fathers have outstripped the philosophers, ancient and modern. Aware of all the philosophical searchings of their time, they advanced beyond them and underlined the practical meaning which these things have for man. Thus the holy Fathers were not unaware of the theories of the philosophers, but they were not philosophers, but theologians, which means that they had the word of revelation. In order to make clear the difference between philosophers and theologians and to show that the holy Fathers were not philosophising, nor can they be characterised as philosophers, and to show that when they spoke of the person and freedom they were not doing it as philosophers, I had to develop the topic "The Holy Fathers and philosophy" in the first chapter.

In the texts which follow, we examine several aspects of the person and freedom which are not usually stressed by those who deal with these subjects.

The orthodox teaching is the only medicine in which we can dissolve all the topics that are engaging us. Orthodox theology is the single truth. And since this is the

teaching of the Church, the Orthodox Church is our only hope, for it is only here that we can really become persons and experience true freedom, which is the fulfilment of the purpose of our existence.

*Written in Athens on the 21st of July 1990,
in memory of our holy Fathers
Symeon the fool for Christ's sake and John,
recalling the verse:*

*"You Father, with sound mind playing the fool,
Having concealed a wise serpent until the end".*

Archimandrite Hierotheos S. Vlachos

1

The holy Fathers and philosophy



The holy Fathers and philosophy

I have often heard in sermons and read in books that the holy Fathers were great philosophers and gave an impetus to the development of philosophy. Admittedly, this great subject has occupied me as well. The questions troubling me were: Are the holy Fathers really philosophers? Did they develop a philosophy in their time? If not, then what is the difference between philosophy and the theology expressed by the holy Fathers? How is the use of the same terms by the philosophers and the great Fathers of the Church be explained? These are some of the questions connected with the working out of this matter of the relationship between philosophy and the theology of the holy Fathers of the Church.

What will follow is a small answer to the questions with which I have been occupied off and on, but I am under no illusion that it will exhaust that great and thorny topic. Nevertheless it is essential that we understand the teaching of the holy Fathers about the person and freedom. For we shall find that when the holy Fathers concerned themselves with such topics, they did it not as philosophers, but as deified men who were expressing their experience of revelation in the terms of their time.

1. Philosophy and theology

It is a commonplace to declare from the start that there is a difference between philosophy and theology, since philosophy is man's invention, founded on the brain and the imagination, while theology is God's revelation to man, to his purified heart. There is the same kind of difference between theology and philosophy as there is between nous and mind.

Man has two cognitive centres. One is the nous, the organ suited for receiving God's revelation which is then formulated by our reason, while the other is reason, which knows the tangible world around us. With our nous we acquire knowledge of God, while with our reason we acquire knowledge of the world and the learning offered by the science of sensory things.

Let us look briefly at the definition, content and method of philosophy.

If we try to define philosophy, we will discover that it is very difficult to give a precise definition, since each philosopher defines it differently. However, the etymology of the word shows it to mean "love of wisdom". According to tradition, the first person who used the term 'philosopher' about himself, and thus originated the word 'philosophy' as well, was Pythagoras. Until then the word 'sophos' or 'sophist', wise man, had been used¹. And because, as we have pointed out, the term 'philosophy' is interpreted by many people in a variety of ways, it is also difficult for us to give a precise definition of it. In what follows we shall use the term chiefly to mean the teaching

1. Christou Androutsou: Dictionary of philosophy, ed. Rigopoulou, 1965, p. 357 (in Greek)

about God, man and the world as it was expressed by the ancient philosophers who tried to interpret these great truths by reasoning and imagination. Essentially we shall be speaking about metaphysics. Thus, judging by the words, but also by the method and methodology of the thinking and teaching, we shall speak of philosophy-metaphysics.

Ancient Greek philosophy makes a clear distinction between matter and reality. It considers reality to be a different thing from matter and the world - all that we see and feel. "A basic assumption of philosophy is that only the unbegotten and unchangeable is immortal and real. Everything which has a beginning in time also has an end"². Starting from this finding, ancient philosophy arrived at various conclusions which are diametrically opposed to the teaching of the Church. According to the ancient philosophers, "creation is either a natural emanation of the essence of the one (pantheism), or a seeming or even fallen reflection of an unbegotten real world of basic ideas (idealism), or an indissoluble union of form and matter, according to which, matter is the principle of multiplication of form, but without independent existence and without beginning (Aristotle)"³. Thus the philosophers either ended in a pantheism according to which God is identified with the world, or in an abstract idealism according to which God is a perfect, impersonal and inactive being which is accompanied by an "unbegotten cluster of basic ideas and values", or else God is something "ever-motionless moving the ever-moving, without contact with the world"⁴.

2. John Romanides: *Ancestral sin*, Domos, Athens 1989, p. 30 (In Greek)

3. *Ibid.* p. 31

4. *Ibid.*

A fruit of this view of God and the creation of the world is that man's aim is hedonism on the one hand and eudaemonism on the other. According to hedonism, the natural impulses are inescapable, and their gratification leads the person to release from the lower pressing needs, while according to eudaemonism, the satisfaction of man's thirst is found when he goes back to the unbegotten and unchangeable, which is the world of ideas⁵. By extension this means that according to philosophy, man's liberation lies in fleeing from perishable matter and attaching himself to the unbegotten⁶.

It can readily be seen that the god of the philosophers and philosophy is not the God of the Church, that the god of philosophy is an abstract and non-existent god and that the man of philosophy is not the same as the man of the Church. We shall look at this more analytically further on and see for ourselves the opposition of the holy Fathers to philosophy and the philosophers.

We spoke before about idealism. We do not forget that this world of the ideas is Plato's basic teaching. According to Plato, the world which we see, and man's soul as well, is a copy of the real world, the world of ideas, and furthermore this world of phenomena is a fall from the world of the reality which is the world of ideas. For Plato the term 'idea' refers to "the universal or general concepts which constitute the permanent nature of the essence of beings and are not only a prototype or pattern of partial being, but also really exist in their own right"⁷. Plato taught that the ideas are "self-existing essences, immaterial, and immuta-

5. See *ibid.* p. 31-32

6. *Ibid.* p. 32

7. Christou Androutsou: *op. cit.* p. 186

ble, but inaccessible to our senses and discernible only through the nous". Because the objects which surround us change easily, they do not give us a precise picture of these unchanging and permanent ideas. The soul retains in its memory recollections of these ideas from the time of its pre-existence, that is to say from before they were imprisoned in the body⁸. Consequently, man's liberation is achieved when the soul recognises and unites with these archetypes, these ideas, and of course when the soul is freed from the body, which is its prison. According to Plato, god is the beginningless and absolute being which is "ever being and neither becoming nor perishing, nor increasing nor decreasing". Thus he sometimes calls god "good", sometimes "idea of the good", sometimes "inexplicable beauty", sometimes "unconditioned beginning", or absolute, sometimes "beginning of all things"⁹.

Aristotle accepted Plato's theory of the ideas. But he did not accept the ideas as self-existing and imperceptible essences, but as forms which exist in perceptible things and as forces which shape matter. Form together with matter "constitutes the essence of beings"¹⁰. In his writings on physical science Aristotle examines the nature of matter, motion, place, the void, the infinite, time. He says all things that have within them "a principle of motion" are natural. It is through movement that matter comes out of its indefiniteness and takes definite shape, form. But the first principle of movement is not to be found in matter. Its principle emanates from god, who is the prime unmoving mover. Aristotle accepts that the world was created by god, but

8. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 10, p. 424 (Gk)

9. *Ibid.* p. 425

10. Christou Androutsou: *op. cit.* p. 51

at the same time he teaches that the world exists pre-eternally. Furthermore, both time and motion will last eternally. Moreover, he says that matter is possessed of a certain love for god, who is the "unmoving mover", and is the source of all making of form. God is the one who inspires love in matter and sets it functioning so that it takes a definite form. This will go on perpetually¹¹.

In all these theories of the philosophers and philosophy we can see the antithesis of theology, and more generally of the Church's teaching and life, at two particular points. One is the content of the philosophers' teaching and the other is the methodology which the philosophers employ in coming to these conclusions.

All of the philosophers' views were rejected by the Fathers of the Church. In the Church we do not accept the teaching about ideas, nor the ontology of God as the philosophers describe it, nor the pre-existence of the soul, nor the eternity of the world and of time, nor what is said about man's release, that the soul must leave the body, which is the soul's prison - nor that God is the prime unmoving mover, etc. By contrast, the holy Fathers express the Church's truth that God is not the idea of the good, as Plato said, but the personal God who was revealed to the Prophets, Apostles and saints. The soul did not pre-exist, but is created by God simultaneously with the body. The body is not the prison of the soul, but together with the soul it constitutes the man, because the body is not the whole man, but the body of the man, and the soul is not the whole man, but the soul of the man. The holy Fathers also teach that the world did not come into existence through its fall from the so-called real world, the world of ideas, but it was cre-

11. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 3, p. 145-146

ated by God in a positive way. They also teach that the world was created "out of naught" and that it is directed by the uncreated Providence and uncreated governing energy of God. The holy Fathers also teach that love is not only a motion of man towards God, as Plato said, nor does it express the powerlessness of man who is moved towards the prime unmoving mover in order to feel completeness, but that it is a positive energy. God is not simply the unmoving mover, but He is at the same time moved towards man. He moves and is moved. And love is not a matter of man's weakness, since God Himself, Who is love and the object of love, Who moves and is moved, is also called love. I have mentioned in brief the central views of the holy Fathers who opposed philosophy. I shall not analyse them further, because it is not my purpose here.

The fact that the Church rejected all these theories of the philosophers can be seen presented concisely in the "Synodikon" of Orthodoxy, a text which is read on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Indeed not only were these theories rejected as heresies, but it is said explicitly and repeatedly that anyone who accepts the theories of the philosophers is anathematised by the Church.

All who accept "the Platonic ideas as true" and say and accept "that matter is self-existent" are anathematised. Likewise all who accept and spread "the false and Hellenic sayings", all who assert that souls pre-exist and that all things did not come into being from naught, and have gone astray" are anathematised. Also anathematised are all who teach a doctrine of "unoriginate matter, and the ideas, or about these being co-eternal with God the Creator of all things" and that all creatures "are without cause and beginning and remain immutable". Likewise anathematised are all who prefer "the foolish so-called wisdom of the

external philosophers", all who follow "the teachers of these things", and all who accept "the metempsychoses of human souls"¹².

But the holy Fathers also rejected the method used by the ancient philosophers, their way of arriving at these conclusions, for it leads to erroneous theories about God, man and creation. The philosophers philosophised by conjecture, imagination, and having reason at the centre, while for the holy Fathers the nous was the centre. They first purified their hearts of passions, and their nous was illuminated. This illumination of the nous is not just knowledge of the archetypes of beings, but the coming of the grace of God into the heart. As a result of this, they attained the vision of God, which is seeing God in the uncreated Light. It is in this way that the holy Prophets, Apostles and saints received the revelation, the manifestation of God in their hearts.

Therefore theology is not related to philosophy, but more akin to medicine. And indeed we observe that all the heretics through the ages used philosophy, whereas the holy Fathers lived heyschasm. We find this in the whole tradition of the Church and in the three Hierarchs, as we shall see in what follows. They followed another method in order to partake of the uncreated grace of God and attain the real knowledge of God. In medical science there is a cure, and through this a person is brought to health. The same is true in orthodox theology. Man cures his organ for knowing, which is the nous, and in this way he attains health and acquires knowledge of God, which also implies his salvation.

12. Triodion, ed. Phos, p. 159-160 (Gk)

But we can add that theology, as Fr. John Romanides says, resembles the positive sciences, physics and mathematics. In physics we have experiment and theory. In mathematics we have action and the confirmation of action. The same is true in orthodox theology. Every modern science has observation and experiment. In orthodox theology there is experiment. We accept the experience of the saints and we struggle to make a personal experiment in our life, to apply and confirm that experience. And if we use the appropriate method and the appropriate path, and of course if God sends His grace, then we too can be led to the vision of God, and to acquire a personal knowledge of God. In the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor experiment is called 'praxis' and the vision of God is called 'theoria'. And this saint claims that 'praxis' and 'theoria' coexist. Therefore he writes epigrammatically: "Praxis is theoria made manifest in terms of action, and theoria is divinely initiated praxis"¹³. Thus orthodox theology is not at all connected with metaphysics, but with medicine and the natural sciences. We must disconnect orthodox theology from western theology, which has influenced us in an unfortunate way. Western theology, which has identified itself with metaphysics has brought innumerable evils upon the western world. This is not the time to go into that.

So the orthodox theologian is a modern man, because he deals with so-called existential problems which are on people's minds, but chiefly because he uses the most modern method, that of observation and action in order to attain the knowledge of God. And when he reaches and attains the knowledge of God, then he feels an inner full-

13. PG 90, 1344 and Philokalia ET vol. 2, p. 257, 89

ness, he experiences God as love and as a lover who moves and is moved.

This does not mean that the orthodox theologian is not interested in ancient philosophy. But he does not regard it as an authority and criterion of life. In the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy", which we mentioned, although those who accept the theories of the ancient philosophers are anathematised, this is not done in anger and hate, but in love and charity, so that they may recover and follow the true path of the cure. Those who study ancient culture are not anathematised. There is a clear distinction between those who accept ancient philosophy and those who study it. The anathema is given "to those who embrace the Hellenic teachings, and not to those who have only been trained in them, but to those who also follow these vain doctrines and even believe them as truths, and to those addicted to them as having validity, with the result that others as well, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, introduce and eagerly teach them"¹⁴.

2. The two educations and the two wisdoms

The things that we have been saying are not theoretical points that we have simply tried to select from the teachings of the philosophers and holy Fathers to present here, but they are practical facts which result in people's salvation or destruction. Indeed throughout all the ages of the Church this dialogue has been going on between the world's education and God's education. If we carefully study the history of the Church, we will find that the heretics were usually supporters of philosophers and followers of their

14. Triodion, ed. Phos, p. 160 (Gk)

teachings, while the holy Fathers were theologians in the proper sense of the word, men who were following the proper method and so acquired the knowledge of God. But here I shall confine myself to presenting a few aspects of the dialogue which took place in Thessaloniki and Constantinople in the fourteenth century between St. Gregory Palamas and Barlaam, because the difference between philosophy and theology or between human knowledge and divine knowledge will be clearly seen.

Barlaam, who had a humanistic spirit, taught that there is one unified truth. He said that the truth is unified and was given to man by God, on the one hand through the Prophets and on the other hand through the philosophers. Of course St. Gregory rejected this position. And after presenting all his teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit, which we shall present in what follows, he ended with the question: "How then is the truth about these things one?"¹⁵

Concretely, Barlaam maintained that it is the same with philosophy as it is with health. Just as there is no difference between the health offered by God and that acquired through medical care, so it is with wisdom as well. "For God gives it to prophets and apostles, but He has given us both the words of the theurgists and the philosophical teachings, and through these in turn, when we seek wisdom, we find it"¹⁶. Barlaam's teaching is also seen clearly in the question which Akindynos put to St. Gregory Palamas. It is in fact well known that Akindynos expresses Barlaam's views. Akindynos says that he has heard some people maintain that monks too should pursue outward wisdom because no one can avoid ignorance and false beliefs or acquire

15. Gregory Palamas: *Triads* 2,1,6

16. *Ibid.* 2,1,4

perfect impassibility, or yet achieve sanctity "unless he gather knowledge from all quarters, above all from Greek culture". That is to say, Barlaam maintained that the ancient Greek culture - philosophy - is itself also a gift of God, which He gave to the philosophers through revelation in the same way as to the Apostles and Prophets, and therefore this culture offers knowledge of beings, but also the very knowledge of God¹⁷. Therefore Barlaam and many like him supported the unity of truth, of course at the expense of the Revelation, and on behalf of philosophy in any case. It was really a great danger for the Orthodox Church.

St. Gregory Palamas perceived the danger of orthodox theology being secularised and he therefore confronted this heresy. I do not propose to mention all of St. Gregory's arguments and teaching. I shall mention only the central points which will show how he differs from the philosopher Barlaam.

In the first place, in his writings the saint repeatedly had to make the distinction between the two wisdoms and the two knowledges. There must be no confusion between these two wisdoms. In addition to his own personal experience, the Apostle Paul's experience and teaching both provide strong support for this teaching. The saint repeatedly uses the Apostle's words: "for since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1,21). He also uses another apostolic saying: "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the

17. Ibid. 1,1,1. Gregory Palamas: The Triads. CWS p. 25

power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2,4-8). He also refers to the passage from James the brother of God who is speaking about divine wisdom: "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic hypocrisy" (James 3,15). He also refers to other passages from Holy Scripture in order to show the difference between the two wisdoms and knowledges, but I shall not give them all. I think that those cited are enough to show that the teaching about the distinction between the two knowledges, carnal and spiritual, is the Church's teaching and the experience of all the saints.

Analysing the apostolic passage from the letter to the Corinthians which we cited above¹⁸, he says that there is an enormous difference between the wisdom of the philosophers and the wisdom of the Prophets and Apostles. Indeed he writes characteristically: "The nous of the philosophers who are outside is likewise a divine gift insofar as it naturally possesses a wisdom endowed with reason. But it has been perverted by the wiles of the devil, who has transformed it into a foolish wisdom, wicked and senseless, since it puts forward such doctrines"¹⁹. Just as in legal marriages, the pleasure derived from procreation cannot be called a gift of God, because it is carnal and of nature, even though that nature has been created by God, we

18. Triads. 1,1,16-18

19. Triads. 1,1,19. CWS p. 25

can say the same about the knowledge that comes from education that is from outside. Even if well used, it is "a natural, not a spiritual gift"²⁰. If we reckon that there is also an education from outside which is contrary to God, then we can say that this wisdom is unspiritual and possessed by the devil. Therefore St. Gregory Palamas asks: "What can God-inspired teaching have to do with foolishness? What does all the truth in the stars matter to the wisdom of divine operation?"²¹.

But human wisdom is often not only different from divine wisdom. It is even contrary to it at the same time. Human wisdom "is also ill-disposed towards true and spiritual knowledge"²². Indeed St. Gregory maintains that all the heresies were generated from human wisdom, which is centred on reasoning and human conjecture. "And if you were to examine the problem, you would see that all or most of the harmful heresies derive their origin from this source"²³. This observation by the saint is noteworthy. For if we look carefully into church history, we shall discover that all the heretics began with human conjecture and anthropocentric views of life. They were always trying to investigate and analyse the truth of the Church through reasoning. By contrast, the holy Fathers were based on the method of orthodox devotion, which is purity of heart and illumination of the nous. After these two stages of their spiritual life they were able to attain knowledge of God and to theologise with divine inspiration and safely within the Church²⁴.

20. Ibid. 1,1,22. CWS p. 25

21. Triads 2,1,6

22. Ibid. 1,1,10

23. Ibid. 1,1,20. CWS p. 28

24. See Archim. Hierotheos Vlachos: *Kairos tou poiisai* (time to act). p. 168-170

3. The Three Hierarchs and philosophy

I think it has been made clear thus far that philosophy moves on a different plane from theology. This means that the holy Fathers were not philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, but theologians, that is to say men who see God. The three Hierarchs, Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom are among those who move in this atmosphere. Some people call them philosophers, and indeed are struck by the fact that the three Hierarchs, especially the first two, studied and read the classical culture. But the facts are not so simple as they seem at first sight.

In the works of the three Hierarchs there are many texts in which the difference between theology and philosophy (metaphysics) is apparent. I shall limit myself to mentioning the most characteristic ones.

a) *S t . B a s i l t h e G r e a t* was not a philosopher of conjecture, but a real theologian. He himself had experience of God. In what follows we shall offer some passages in which the truth can be seen that he was under the working of God's grace and that he held philosophy as well as that more general culture in a subordinate position.

An excerpt from the letter which he sent to Eustathios of Sebasteia is characteristic. In this letter St. Basil the Great confesses the sorrow which overcame him because he had ruined his whole youth in fruitless toil, "while I occupied myself with acquiring the precepts of that wisdom made foolish by God". He says that human wisdom is made foolish by God, and in fact he calls it fruitless toil. Then he says that as soon as he had awakened from his deep sleep, meaning the period spent in studying human

wisdom, he discovered at once "the uselessness of the wisdom of the princes of this world who have come to naught", and looking out upon the "marvellous light of the truth of the Gospel", he bemoaned his piteous life and prayed to be given guidance "to the introduction to the teachings of religion". And first of all he was concerned to correct his character, which had for a long time been perverted by association with the "wicked". He studied the Gospel and found that preconditions for salvation are the selling of one's goods, having no thought of this life, and for the soul to have no sympathetic concern with the things of this world. Therefore he sought a guide to show him this way, "to traverse with him this life's brief flood". Then he says that he visited ascetics who lived in Alexandria, all of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. He marvelled at their steadfastness in sufferings and their vigour in prayers, as if being sojourners in this world. And he writes: "I prayed that I myself also, in so far as was attainable by me, might be an emulator of these men"²⁵. In this passage one can see St. Basil's general view of human culture and divine culture.

In fact after his studies in which he ascertained the uselessness of the wisdom of this world for the salvation of one's soul and for acquiring knowledge of God, St. Basil the Great became interested in attaining divine wisdom, which is not unconnected with partaking of the uncreated purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God. In his writings one can see clearly that he had experiences of the spiritual life because he was a temple of the All-holy Spirit. It was not reasoning by conjectures that formed the centre of his existence, but it was his heart with its experiences of the coming of divine grace.

25. Basil the Great, Letter 223, LCL vol. 3, p. 293f

St. Basil the Great went through deep repentance and purified his heart from passions. In order for man to be united with God, his heart must be made ready. He writes: "Making the heart ready for it means the unlearning of the teachings which already possess it, derived from evil habits"²⁶.

He himself had great experience of this repentance, that is to say, he partook of God's purifying energy. This can be seen in his descriptions of the penitent heart. Interpreting a passage from a psalm: "you have turned for me my mourning into joy", he says that this joy does not come to just anyone, "but if someone has grieved greatly over his sin with much lamentation and ceaseless tears and has mourned as if he himself were dead, that man's mourning is turned to joy"²⁷. Referring back to the prophetic "we piped for you, and you did not dance, we mourned to you, and you did not lament", he says that the Prophets mourned, urging us to grieve over our sins so that we "become aware of our sins, tormenting our flesh with labours and travail"²⁸.

Through this repentance the heart is purified and the nous returns to it from its diffusion. The nous must be detached from cares, come to the heart and thus see the truth, for a nous which is dissipated by many cares "cannot focus itself distinctly on the truth"²⁹. This is the aim to which hesychia or stillness, in the full orthodox sense of the word, is directed. Hesychia is the beginning of purification of the soul³⁰. In this way a man's nous is not dissipated on

26. Letter to Gregory. LCL vol. 1, p. 11

27. Basil the Great: Commentary on Psalm 29 (30). EPE vol. 5, p. 156

28. Ibid.

29. Basil the Great: Letter to Gregory. LCL vol. 1, p. 9

30. Ibid. p. 13

extraneous things, nor diffused over the surrounding world through the senses, but returns to itself and of its own accord ascends to the sense of God Himself. Then when it is illuminated by the beauty of the grace of God, "it becomes forgetful even of its own nature; no longer able to drag the soul down to thought of sustenance or to concern for the body's covering, but enjoying leisure from earthly cares, it transfers all its interest to the acquisition of the eternal goods"³¹.

When the nous has entered the heart and united with it through God's energy, it manifests the indwelling of God in the heart, which is very closely linked with unceasing prayer, the constant mindfulness of God. At that moment the person becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. He has cares, but his reason busies itself with them, while his nous, in spite of the cares, is constantly mindful of God and "the continuity of the mindfulness of is Him not interrupted", nor is the nous disturbed "by unforeseen passions", "but the lover of God, escaping them all, retires to God"³².

In this state a great love for God develops, this unbearable longing. Speaking of the love of God, Basil the Great characterises "the soul's longing" as sharp and unbearable and links it with the vision of God. Speaking of the vision of God, of the uncreated Light, the saint asks: "What is more wonderful than divine beauty? What thought is more lovely than the majesty of God? What longing of the soul is so sharp and unbearable as that which comes from God to the soul which has been purified of all evil and says with true emotion: 'I languish with love'?"³³. It is charac-

31. Ibid. p. 15

32. Ibid. p. 19

33. Basil the Great: EPE vol. 8, p. 188

teristic here that love is intimately connected with the vision of God which comes to the person who has purified his heart of passions. Speaking of vision of the uncreated Light, he says: "Utterly inexpressible and indescribable are the lightning flashes of divine beauty: word cannot put them forth, nor hearing receive them". Neither the light of the sun nor the brightness of the moon nor the rays of the morning star are worthy of reflecting the glory of God. And he goes on: "This beauty is invisible to the eyes of flesh; it is perceptible only to the soul and spirit, and those saints whom it has illuminated are left with the dart of unbearable longing". The saints in this condition, since they could not be completely satisfied by the vision of divine beauty, prayed that the vision of the sweetness of the Lord might be continued throughout eternal life"³⁴.

These few passages show the difference between worldly education and divine education and between philosophy and theology. Likewise they show that St. Basil the Great studied philosophy, but he finally abandoned it because he was living another life, partaking of the deifying energy of God.

Of course we cannot ignore the fact that there is also a work by St. Basil the Great entitled "Homily to the young on how they could make use of Hellenic writings", in which the young are urged to study classical education.

But in order that we understand what St. Basil is saying and do not make exaggerated use of this homily, some essential clarifying points must be made.

The first is that this homily must not be singled out and isolated from the whole teaching of St. Basil the Great as we have presented it. The second is that the saint was urg-

34. Ibid. p. 188-190

ing the study of classical Greek culture, without seeming to accept Greek philosophy. We are sure that what he was saying does not show that he accepted the basic philosophical theories, as we described them at the beginning of this chapter and against which he contended throughout his life. Furthermore, the heresies opposed by him were making much use of Greek philosophy. Thirdly, the youth are urged to study the poets, but he clearly advises them "not to turn the attention of your nous to everything from now on, but when the deeds or words of good men are told you, to love and emulate them"³⁵. He says that they must avoid imitating evil-doers and do as Odysseus did when he sealed his ears³⁶. In other words, he urges us to associate with poets, prose writers and orators "from whom the attention of our soul would bring some benefit"³⁷, but not to accept their life and philosophy. Fourthly, Basil the Great does not entirely accept the science of his time, but he judges it by theological criteria, as can be seen in his homilies about the six days of creation. And fifth, he did not write this homily near the end of his life, but long before, and indeed when Julian the Apostate was forbidding the Christian teachers to teach classical philology, rhetoric and philosophy³⁸. The things that St. Basil wrote show that the Christians knew classical Greek education and could benefit from it externally. But also this prohibition by Julian shows that the Christian teachers did not accept Greek learning entirely, but judged it by ecclesiastical criteria.

In any case it is clear from his whole teaching that Ba-

35. Basil the Great. EPE vol. 7, p. 322-324

36. Ibid. p. 324

37. Ibid. p. 320

38. Ibid. p. 22

sil the Great that he did not accept the philosophy of his time, which was connected with metaphysics, since it was diametrically opposed to the Church's basic truths of revelation.

b) Although St. Gregory the Theologian studied the philosophy and all the learning of his time, nevertheless he did not philosophise, he did not conjecture, that is to say he did not try to imagine God and make Him fit with his own personal notions. What follows will be based mainly on five theological orations, to which he also owes the title of the theologian.

His basic theological position is that a theologian is one who has attained the vision of God. It is not permitted to everyone to theologise, but only to "those who are passed masters in the vision of God, and who have been previously purified in soul and body, or at the very least are being purified". Purification comes first and vision of God follows, which makes the person a true theologian³⁹.

He calls those who do not follow this method 'praters'⁴⁰, chatterboxes who talk without having knowledge from personal experience, and who, especially, talk about God while they do not understand material reality.

St. Gregory the Theologian expresses man's inability to make conjectures about God, about the Holy Trinity. Referring to Plato, who theologised in a philosophical way, the saint says: "as one of the Greeks philosophised theologising, and indeed not without skill" - and he says: "to apprehend God is difficult, but to express Him is impossi-

39. Gregory the Theologian. First theological oration, 3. NPNFns vol. 7, p. 285

40. Ibid. Fifth theological oration, 13. NPNF p. 322

ble". He was turning around what Plato had maintained, that it is difficult to apprehend God, but to define him in words is an impossibility. St. Gregory said that just the opposite is true. "It is impossible to express God... and yet more impossible to conceive Him"⁴¹. Thus it is completely impossible for anyone to understand God through reasoning and conjecture. This is a fundamental theological argument and a fundamental theological thought. What we know about God is not a product of invention and conjecture, but a fruit of experience and a revelation by God Himself. For anyone to contain God in his thought is not only impossible and unattainable for "the utterly careless and ignorant, but "even for those who are highly exalted and who love God"⁴².

When studying carefully the theological orations of St. Gregory the Theologian, one will be amazed at the way in which the saint pulverises the arguments of those Arians and fighters against the Spirit who in his time were attempting to interpret the unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity by conjectures. Essentially the saint mocked them and proved them incapable of doing this work. In reality it is not a malicious irony, but he uses their own arguments to demonstrate their inability to interpret the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

In the third theological oration, which refers to the begetting of the Son by the Father and the divinity of the Son, he recalls the words of Plato, who in philosophising about the first and second cause, said that the second cause came from the first "as if it were a bowl overflowing". But the saint says that we could not speak about God in that

41. Ibid. p. 40. Second theological oration, 4. NPNF p. 289f

42. Ibid. p. 290

way, for we would be introducing generation as involuntary, "like some useless natural overflow, hard to be retained". We must, says the saint, keep to the revelation which Christ brought and the Holy Spirit poured out, without trying to philosophise.

Then he takes away the arguments of the heretics, at the same time making clear the great weakness and confusion of those arguments based on reasoning. To the question when did these things come about - namely the begetting of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, he answers: "beyond the when", meaning that the begetting of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit are all "beyond the when", outside of when, and of course when there was the Father. And to the question "When was there the Father, he answers: "There was no time when the Father was not". Of course there was not a time when the Son and the Holy Spirit were not. Then by the method of question and answer he writes: "When was the Son begotten? When the Father was not begotten. When did the Holy Spirit proceed? When the Son did not proceed but was begotten beyond time and beyond the grasp of reason".

Asking and answering in this way, St. Gregory the Theologian uses syllogisms to refute the syllogisms of the heretics, who were philosophising about the mystery of the Holy Trinity. He asks himself: "How then can this begetting (of the Son) be passionless?" He answers that this is so "because it is incorporeal. For if corporeal generation involves passion, incorporeal generation excludes it". Then the saint says: "I marvel that you do not venture so far as to conceive of marriages and times of pregnancy and dangers of miscarriage." In answer to the question: "who then is that Father who had no beginning?" he says: "one whose very Existence had no beginning". And pulverising the

syllogisms of the heretics he asserts that the Father is Father because He is not a Son. It seems clear here that St. Gregory the Theologian accepts revelation without trying to think it out, and in essence he discards philosophy.

In speaking of the Father he says characteristically: "Will you then let me play a little upon this word Father?" And he goes on to thoughts which overturn the syllogisms of the heretics. The heretics of his time were trying to understand logically the way in which the Father exists. And he asks whether the Father is God willingly or unwillingly. The saint answers characteristically: And in order that you escape your clever arguments, I will ask you: If God exists willingly, when did He begin to will? It could not have been before He began to be, for there was nothing prior to Him. Or is one part of Him will and another the object of will? If so, He is divisible. How then, in your opinion, is not He Himself a Child of will? And if unwilling, what compelled Him to exist? And how is He God if He was compelled - and to nothing less than to be God? How then was He begotten, says my opponent. How was He created if, as you say, He was created? For this is a part of the same difficulty. Perhaps you would say, by will and word. You have not yet told the whole truth: it remains for you to show how will and word gained the power of action. For man was not created in this way.

In reply to the heretics' question how the Son was begotten by the Father, the saint answers that if we could understand how the Son was begotten, then this generation would have been no great thing. It is difficult because we do not even know our own generation. First we have to understand about conception, formation, manifestation, and the bond whereby soul is united to body, nous to soul; and movement, increase, assimilation of food, sense, memory,

recollection, what energies belong to the body and soul together, and which to each independently of the other and so many other things connected with man's generation and increase. Even if we explain all these things, we will still be unable to philosophise about the generation of God; "for that would be unsafe", in other words it is dangerous. Therefore, as the saint says epigrammatically, the begetting of God must be honoured by silence. It is a great thing for us to learn that He was begotten, but not how. He writes: "The begetting of God must be honoured by silence; it is a great thing for you to learn that He was begotten; but not how. We will not admit that even angels, much less you, can conceive the manner of His Generation". In answer to another question, whether the Son existed or not before He was begotten by the Father, he replies: "What utter nonsense!"⁴³.

In refuting the question posed by the heretics who were philosophising about what precisely the procession of the Holy Spirit is, St. Gregory the Theologian says characteristically: "You tell me what is the unbegottenness of the Father, and I will explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, and we shall both go mad prying into the mystery of God"⁴⁴.

These examples, which are a small part of those used by St. Gregory, show that we cannot interpret these mysteries by logic. It is essentially in this way that the saint pummels the philosophy used by the heretics to make theology. He often says: "you give me... and I will give you...", meaning "you prove to me... and I will prove to you..."⁴⁵.

43. Third theological discourse, 1-9. NPNF p. 301-304

44. Fifth theological oration, 8. NPNF p. 320

45. Ibid. 10. NPNF p. 321

At the close of the first theological oration, in which he presents the foundations of orthodox theology, he is epigrammatic when he advises us to discard the heretical ideas of the philosophers. He says: "Attack the ideas of Plato, and the transmigration and courses of our souls, and the reminiscences, and the unlovely loves of the soul for lovely bodies. Attack the atheism of Epicurus, and his atoms, and his unphilosophic pleasure; or Aristotle's petty Providence, and his artificial system, and his discourses about the mortality of the soul, and the humanitarianism of his doctrine. Attack the superciliousness of the Stoa, or the greed and vulgarity of the Cynic. Attack the void, full of nonsense, and all the details about the gods and the sacrifices and the idols and demons. whether beneficent or malignant, and all the tricks people play with divination, evoking of gods, or of souls, and the power of the stars"⁴⁶.

The fact that we cannot conjecture about God does not mean that St. Gregory expresses an agnosticism. He simply describes a different method of knowing God. And this method is the one to which we referred before: purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and deification, which is connected with the vision of God.

I would like to mention two experiences that St. Gregory the Theologian had of the vision of God, as he himself describes them. He writes: "I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the Mount, and drew aside the curtain of the Cloud, and entered away from matter and material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up, I scarcely saw the back parts of God"⁴⁷. Here is the description not only of

46. First theological oration. NPNF p. 288

47. Second theological oration, 3. NPNF p. 289

the vision of God which he had, but also the way to reach it, which is to concentrate the nous within the heart.

At the beginning of his oration "on dogma and the position of bishops", he criticises the theologians of his time, who were speaking from their conjectures, and shows how to reach the vision of God and true theology. He writes: "When I see the talking that goes on in our time and the self-appointed theologians who, only because they want to be wise, think that they are, I long for the highest philosophy and wish to stay by myself. What I consider most important is to close my senses, to be apart from the flesh and the world, to have no contact with things human, excepting the most necessary, to remain by myself, that is to concentrate my nous within, and live in God, above things seen, and always keep transparent within me the divine manifestations, that is to say, sharing the uncreated energies which are pure of created realities and, like a pure image of God and the divine which I both am and am continually becoming, cleansing this mirror of my soul and taking on light for light and from dark becoming light, until I reach the source of the reflections and attain the blessed end, which is of course the deification of man and true theology⁴⁸.

In the teaching of St. Gregory there is no trace of philosophy, but of a clear theology connected with the vision of God. He calls the heretic who bases himself on philosophy a talkative dialectician⁴⁹.

c) St. J o h n C h r y s o s t o m did not study in Athens, as Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian had done, but he too studied the ancient classical teaching un-

48. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 20. EPE 4, p. 256

49. First theological oration, 8. NPNF p. 287

der the orator Livanios and the philosopher Andragathios. At quite a young age he broke off his studies in order to take up theology and be baptised. The education which Livanios and Andragathios offered was not as high as that of Athens, but it was aimed at preparing young people for administrative positions or practicing the profession of a speaker in the law courts. With this goal he came in touch with the classical writers, men of letters, poets and philosophers in order to learn the art of speaking⁵⁰.

It seems from his works that St. John Chrysostom had a good knowledge of the life and teaching of Plato, making use of quotations from him, and in his writings referring to Plato's books⁵¹. But his criticism of Plato is radical. Many times in his works he refers particularly to Plato's teaching and condemns it. This may be because Neoplatonism was more dominant in his time. In what follows we shall mention only a few examples of St. John Chrysostom's teaching, in order to make clear his stand against philosophy, and mainly to show that he did not accept philosophy for Christianity.

In interpreting the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans, especially the first chapter, he makes significant comments. He says that the wise men of old attempted to go the way leading to heaven, and that when they extinguished the light, and instead of the light put their trust in "the darkness of their own reasoning", and when they looked for the incorporeal God in bodies, and looked in shapes for Him Who has no shape, they "underwent a most rueful shipwreck". But the philosophers, trying to attain knowledge of God

50. Theodore Zisi: *Man and world in God's economy according to John Chrysostom*. PIPM, Thessaloniki 1971, p. 27. (In Greek)

51. *Ibid.* p. 30

through logic and conjectures, and considering themselves as something great, "were plunged into the reasonings of senselessness". Of course here, as it seems, the suggestion is of the metaphysics which attempted to interpret God through human conjecture. And he goes on to say that the ancient wise men committed many outrages by the method which they followed. The first is that they did not see God. The second is that they did not see God even though they had great and wise means for doing it. The third is that they did not see God although they were wise and the fourth, that they not only did not find God, "but even lowered Him to devils and to stones and stocks"⁵². So the worship of idols in place of the real God is in reality worship of demons.

At another point he presents the sorry state of the philosophers who still worship the signs of the heavens, to which they give the names of animals. He writes: "And some of the philosophers even lifted up to Heaven bulls, and scorpions, and dragons, and all the rest of that vanity". Indeed he maintains that "everywhere the devil was busy making men into likenesses of serpents, and subordinating to the most irrational those whom God wanted to lift up above the heavens"⁵³.

He also comments on the fact that the views of the philosophers differed among themselves, that they did not have a unified teaching. Aristotle turned against Plato, the Stoics were angry with Aristotle and in general were fighting against one another. And St. John Chrysostom concluded: "so that we should not marvel so much at them for their wisdom as turn away from them indignant and hate them,

52. John Chrysostom. Homily 3 on Romans. NPNF vol. 11, p. 352f

53. Ibid. p. 353

because through this very thing they have become fools. For had they not trusted what they have to reasonings, and syllogisms and sophistries, they would not have suffered what they did suffer"⁵⁴. So the philosophers suffered what they suffered because they entrusted themselves to their own thoughts and syllogisms. And therefore not only do we not have to admire them for their wisdom, but we must turn them away. Of course this rejection does not refer to their persons, but mainly to their teaching, that is to say, their philosophy (metaphysics), which produced so many evils.

In his homily on the Acts of the Apostles, and referring to the Christians of that first Church, he says that these "inexperienced, unskilled of tongue and very ordinary men matched themselves against juggling conjurors, against impostors, against the whole throng of sophists, rhetoricians, philosophers grown mouldy in the Academy and the walks of the Peripatetics and fought the battle out"⁵⁵. So the first Christians, who received the Holy Spirit and became true theologians, confronted all the philosophers and won. This shows the value of theology as against philosophy.

Making a comparison between the Apostle Peter and Plato, he says: "And Plato, who talked a deal of nonsense in his day, is silent now, while this man speaks everywhere, not only among his own countrymen, but among the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, in India and every part of the earth, and to the ends of the world"⁵⁶. He called what Plato proclaimed a nonsense which had at least stopped and was not listened to any longer. And speaking of the glory of the

54. Ibid.

55. John Chrysostom. Homily 4 on Acts. NPNF vol. 11, p. 29

56. Ibid.

Apostle Peter, he asks: "Where now is Greece, with her big pretensions? Where the name of Athens? Where the ravings of the philosophers?" The philosophers did not reach the Kingdom of Heaven because they did not take the royal road which is easy and smooth, but they trod "the rough and steep and arduous one"⁵⁷.

In answer to the question whether Christ exercised his influence on Plato and Pythagoras, he says characteristically: "Because the mind of Peter was much more philosophical than theirs. They were in truth children shifted about on all sides by vain glory; but this man was a philosopher, one receptive to grace"⁵⁸. So there is godly philosophy and there is worldly philosophy. The godly philosophy is really theology, which is a fruit of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the heart of man.

After this observation the saint says: "If you laugh when you hear these things, it is no wonder; for even those who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost and saw the joy of the Apostles said that they were drunk". He goes on to describe Plato and his teachings. "He wasted his time over a set of idle and useless dogmas". And it is unnecessary because it is no help to us to know that the soul of the philosopher becomes a fly. And characterising Plato, he says: "the man was full of irony, and of jealous feelings against everyone else". He employs various examples to say that the devil was working on the philosophers and making them create such theories: "For the devil has always endeavoured by these means to show that our race is not more honourable than that of the animals"⁵⁹.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid. p. 29f

59. Ibid. p. 30

By contrast, the Apostle Peter, because he had the Holy Spirit, uttered a sound, and scattered the mist of the universe, just as the light shines in the darkness. And Peter's way of life was different from that of the philosophers. "But how gentle his deportment, how considerate, how far above all vainglory; how he looked towards heaven without any self-elation, and this even when raising up the dead!"⁶⁰. The comparison between the Apostle Peter and Plato is in reality a comparison between theologians and philosophers.

This comparison applies also between the Apostle Paul and Plato, and more generally all the philosophers. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Where now are the wise of the Greeks, they that wear long beards, and that are clad in open dress, and puff forth great words? The tent-maker converted all Greece and all barbarian lands". And while Plato went to Sicily and not only failed to get the better of a single king, "but came off so wretchedly as even to have lost his liberty", the tent-maker Paul not only went to Sicily and Italy, "but ran over the whole world" and brought many to salvation⁶¹.

I could make use of other examples as well, but I will stop with these because I think that the truth is clear that the holy Fathers, and especially the three Hierarchs here, while they studied the ancient classical learning and philosophy, did not have a good opinion of it. There is no comparison between the theologians and the philosophers. To be sure, when we speak of philosophy we mean chiefly metaphysics, which sought to study God through conjec-

60. Ibid. p. 31

61. John Chrysostom. Homily 2 on Romans. NPNF vol. 11, p. 347

ture and created an imaginary God, as we have seen, for the Fathers too accept that theology is the true philosophy.

It must be emphasised that the saints acquired the knowledge of God not through the study of classical culture and philosophy, but through purification, illumination and deification. They were chiefly the ones who attained the vision of the uncreated Light, attained theological initiation, the "enduring knowledge". And when they theologised they did it because they had the experience and because there were heretics who denied fundamental truths of the faith and who, if they had prevailed, would have done away with the method and path to salvation. Thus the holy Fathers spoke about the Hypostases or Persons and the Essence of the Holy Trinity, about the essence and energy of God and about all the truths, not because they had powerful brains and were possessors of education, but because they had personal experience of uncreated grace, because they had attained the vision of God, that is to say they had seen Christ in His glory. Their learning helped them to formulate, but did not offer knowledge.

Father John Romanides observes: "The deified knows from experience: a) the interpenetration and incommunicability of the persons of the Holy Trinity, b) the existence of the two from the one, c) the mutual sharing of the one uncreated essence and of this natural glory, kingdom and energy, d) the imparticipability of the divine essence and the participability of its natural glory, energy and kingdom, e) that not only the imparticipable uncreated glory, kingdom and energy, but also the participable uncreated glory, kingdom and essence surpass man's natural cognitive ability, f) that not only the divine essence but also the divine energy have nothing in common with the creatures, and g) that the Logos, consubstantial with the Father, be-

came consubstantial with us from the Virgin, and that the Son by nature became man by nature, so that Christ is by nature the source of deification of the deified, source of the illumination of the illumined, source of purification of the purified, and of the creative, cohesive and providential power of all things.

It becomes known through deification that all that is uncreated in God is common to the three persons - such as divine essence, natural glory, kingdom, energy and will - apart from the unbegottenness of the Father, the begottenness of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. The Logos only differs in having a created human nature with its natural energy and will. The Holy Spirit does not have a special energy like that of the created nature of Christ, so its energy is absolutely identified with that of the Father and the Son, and hence "it will not speak from itself, but will speak what it hears..."⁶².

Thus when the holy Fathers spoke theology, they did not do it within philosophy. What they said was a fruit of experience, that is to say it was a revelation of God to those who had attained deification. Therefore they differ clearly from the philosophers and from the heretics who based themselves on philosophy.

4. The term 'philosophy' used by the Fathers

We have so far been analysing the difference between philosophy and theology as well as the attitude of the Three Hierarchs towards philosophy. I think that the examples and passages which we have used have made this difference clear and demonstrated that the holy Fathers did not

62. John Romanides: *The ancestral sin*. Domos, Athens 1989, p. xxxiii

accept philosophy, because this would have meant denying God's revelation.

However, there are some who maintain that the holy Fathers accepted philosophy, because this word is to be found in their works. For instance St. Gregory the Theologian says somewhere: "Not to every one, my friends, does it belong to philosophise about God"⁶³. Basil the Great says that he who is training his soul towards the good and his body towards the necessary "may be accurately characterised by us as a philosopher"⁶⁴. And St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the disciples' words to Christ: "Why could we not cast it out?" (the demon) (Matt. 17,19), says: "Do thou also marvel at their philosophy here, and the might of the Spirit, their philosophy for not having hidden their fault, and the might of the Spirit..."⁶⁵.

But to the casual eye it seems that here they are using the term 'philosophy' to mean other things and not the views of philosophy in the sense of Plato's ideas and Aristotle's unmoving prime mover, which constitute so-called metaphysics. In these cases the word 'philosophy' has the meaning of true wisdom, of the sound and right thought of right behaviour, but also the meaning of theology.

The fact that the word 'philosophy' has many meanings in the works of the Fathers is seen from a writing of St. John of Damascus, called "philosophical chapters", which in the West has been called "dialectics", and is the first of the three books which have the title "fount of knowledge". In this work St. John of Damascus, summarising the whole patristic Tradition, gives the definitions of philosophy and clarifies matters.

63. Gregory the Theologian: First theological oration. NPNF vol. 7, p. 285

64. Basil the Great. EPE 9, p. 478

65. Homily 57 on St. Matthew. NPNF vol. 10, p. 355

First it must be noted that the ancient Greeks often also gave the name 'philosophy' to all that can be scientifically known. Some of the Fathers too used the term in this sense.

St. John of Damascus gives six definitions of philosophy.

First, "philosophy is a knowledge of things which are, in so far as they are, that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being". Science is concerned with this knowledge of things which are.

Second, "philosophy is knowledge of both divine and human things, that is to say, of things both visible and invisible". By this definition philosophy is also said to be the science and theology which is concerned with God.

Third, "philosophy, again, is a study of death, whether this be voluntary or natural". Natural death is the soul's departure from the body, while voluntary death is the killing of the passions or, better, the transformation of the passions, which is achieved through purifying the heart. Therefore St. Maximus the Confessor calls purification of the heart philosophy.

Fourth. "Philosophy is the making of oneself like God". In this sense philosophy is man's journey towards deification. It is very characteristic that in the patristic texts the terms 'philosophy' and 'theology' are sometimes interchanged. The philosophers are called theologians when they are concerned with God, and the theologians are characterised as philosophers, because they have the theology of revelation par excellence. The theologians in the orthodox sense are those who see God.

Fifth. "Philosophy is the art of arts and science of sciences. This is because philosophy is the principle of every art, since it is through this that every art and science has

been invented". In this definition too it seems that philosophy is science.

And the sixth definition is: "Philosophy, again, is a love of wisdom. But true wisdom is God. Therefore, the love of God, this is the true philosophy".

After these definitions of philosophy St. John of Damascus says that philosophy is divided into speculative and practical. The speculative is divided into theology, science and mathematics. The practical is divided into ethics, domestic economy, and politics"⁶⁶.

It seems that St. John of Damascus does not include philosophy - metaphysics in any of these definitions. He calls science natural philosophy and theology true philosophy. At no point does he speak of metaphysics, which indeed the holy Fathers, as we analysed previously, did not accept.

5. Conclusion

And in order to move on I wish to summarise by saying that the holy Fathers and the Three Hierarchs were not philosophers in the sense which we give to philosophy; they did not accept the principles of metaphysics, but were practical theologians and men who saw God. The teachings of philosophy and theology differ from each other, as do the ways in which they acquire knowledge.

I will not make a greater analysis here or indicate what are the consequences for our life. What I must point out is that the education in our country should be steeped, as it always was, in true philosophy, which is theology. And true

66. St. John of Damascus: *Dialectics* ch. 3. Writings, FC vol. 37, p. 11-12.

theology is no cerebral knowledge, but chiefly and above all, life. Nor is this life a repudiation of some things, it is not negative work, but first and foremost, positive.

I say this because many people have linked theology with some mental constructs and sterile moralisations and are therefore afraid to approach it. However, theology is the practical life and the true wisdom. It helps us to face realistically and soundly all the problems, all the autonomisings and idolatries of life. And therefore it is liberating, sanctifying and integrating. Today when we are receiving the impact of so many different currents, this teaching and life of the holy Fathers is a necessity.

2

**The human person according
to the holy Fathers**



The human person according to the holy Fathers

As I begin to take up the topic "the human person according to the holy Fathers", I am reflecting on the gravity and the responsibilities of it. We are dealing with a delicate problem but one that is essential for our time. It is delicate because it has many aspects and extensions to things which have to be faced with responsibility and discretion. Yet it is necessary for our time, because there are numerous religious, philosophical, political and social systems which have a distorted teaching about man, because they regard him as a simple biological monad and nothing more. I want particularly to emphasise all the hinduistic systems, all the religious interpretations concerning man which are coming to us from the East and have turned man into a simple biological monad, not seeing him as a person.

In spite of sensing the crucial and delicate nature of the topic, I shall undertake to formulate some thoughts, because it is essential for our time. Both our spiritual integration and the development of a true spirit of humanity depend on how we stand on this subject. All the religious, political and social principles can be sustained on this proper foundation.

1. The theology of the person

It must be said from the very beginning that the holy Fathers used the term 'prosopon', (person), first and foremost in referring to God, and particularly the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. A whole process had to be gone through in order to arrive at the formulation that the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are particular Persons-Hypostases, but have a common essence or substance. The common substance does not remove the particularity of the Persons-Hypostases, and the Persons-Hypostases do not remove or break the oneness of the substance.

In ancient Greece the word 'prosopon', which now means 'person', had more the meaning of the mask which the actors used to play different roles on the stage. There is a whole history surrounding the development of the mask into a person. Through a long process the word that was used to mean 'mask' finally came to mean not simply something that one puts on, but what makes one a real human being¹.

The holy Fathers did this work chiefly in the fourth century, in their effort to confront various heretics who, in using Greek philosophy, were distorting Christ's teaching about the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Thus we can say that real orthodox theology is experiential and ascetic, while dogmatic theology is mainly "polemic", which means that the Fathers applied various terms from philosophy, not in order to understand and increase or improve the orthodox faith, which is revelation, but in order to express it in the

1. See analysis in John D. Zizioulas: *Being and Communion*. DLT and SVS, 1985, pp. 27-49

terms of their time and to protect it from various distortions.

In what follows I would like us to take a look at how the holy Fathers came to apply the term 'Prosopon' to the Trinitarian God.

Various philosophising theologians, in their attempt to clarify the relationship between the Father and the Son, ended in a variety of dangerous and heretical teachings. In opposition to the gnostic polyarchy there developed two 'monarchian' parties: the patropaschites and the adoptionists. The former teach that the Son is identical with the Father, while the latter deny the divinity of the Son or Word. The heresy of the patropaschites was shaped and developed further by Sabellios, who maintained that the Christian God is one, but at times He took on a different prosopon, a different mask. So in the Old Testament he is presented as Father, and in the New Testament as Son and in the period of the Church as Holy Spirit. In reality Sabellios was identifying the substance with the hypostasis. This teaching overturns and distorts the revealed truth about the Trinitarian God. And if it had prevailed, it would have had dreadful consequences for theology, the Church and for man's salvation².

The holy Fathers confronted this heresy, which confused the hypostatic characteristics of the Persons of the Holy Trinity and in effect broke up the Trinitarianness of God. I should like to refer briefly to the teaching of st. Basil the Great on this subject so as to show the process by which the theology of the person was settled.

In his texts Basil the Great refers many times to the teaching of Sabellios. He writes that Sabellios regarded

2. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 10, p. 1106 (in Greek)

God as one, but transformed by different masks: "...that the same God, though one in substance, is transformed on every occasion according to necessary circumstances, and is spoken of now as Father, and now as Son, and now as Holy Spirit"³. Thus the persons of the Trinitarian God are really without substance, they lack ontology. Commenting on this, Basil the Great observes: "For not even Sabellius rejected the non-subsistent representation of the Persons"⁴. Also in other texts of Basil the Great we can find this teaching of Sabellius which regards the person as a mask which is not connected with the hypostasis⁵.

Basil the Great, however, is not content simply to present the teaching of Sabellios, but he refutes it and at the same time expresses the revealed truth in the terms of his time. In what follows I should like us to look at the theological views of Basil the Great relating to the Person of God.

He writes that just as anyone who does not accept the common essence falls into polytheism, so also anyone who discards "the distinction of hypostases", is led to Judaism⁶. We as Christians believe in the Triune God, who has a common essence and distinct hypostases. But in order to reach this point and express himself as perfectly as possible, Basil the Great does two very important things.

First he separates the essence (*ousia*) from the hypostasis. Until then the essence was identified with the hypostasis, and this still appears also in the dogmatic formulation

3. Basil the Great. Letter 210. To the learned of Neocaesarea. LCL vol. 3, p. 211

4. Ibid.

5. Letter 125. A transcript of faith. LCL vol. 2 p. 265ff and Letter 214 To Count Terentius. LCL vol. 3, p. 233

6. Basil the Great. Letter 210, to the learned in Neocaesarea. LCL vol. 3, p. 211

of the First Ecumenical Council. Basil the Great says that the essence or nature is what held is common in the Trinitarian God and that the hypostases are the particular ways of being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. On this subject he says: "substance and person have the distinction that the general has with reference to the particular; for example, just as 'a living creature' has with reference to 'a particular man'. For this reason we confess one essence for the Godhead, so as not to hand down variously the definition of Its existence, but we confess a person that is particular, in order that our conception of Father and Son and Holy Spirit will be distinct and perfectly clear to us"⁷. Making this distinction was a great effort, and I might say that it was a great "revolution", which finally prevailed, thanks to the great influence of the personality of Basil the Great.

Secondly, Basil the Great identified the hypostasis with the person. Thus while until that time 'person' had meant something "unreal", the mask, from the time of Basil the Great, and thanks to his own efforts, the person has acquired ontology and substance. The person is identified with the hypostasis, and is not something abstract, it is not a mask. St. Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea, writes characteristically: "For it is not sufficient to enumerate the difference in the Persons, but it is necessary to confess that each Person subsists in a true hypostasis"⁸. Referring to the term 'homousios', he says that it is the most suitable for expressing the relationship of the Son to the Father: "This term also sets aright the error of Sabellios; for

7. Basil the Great: Letter 236. To Amphilochios. LCL vol. 3, p. 401-403

8. Basil the Great. Letter 210, LCL vol. 3, p. 211

it does away with the identity of person ('hypostasis') and introduces a perfect notion of the Persons of the Godhead"⁹. Thus the 'prosopon' - when identified with the hypostasis - which is the essence with the particular peculiarities - takes on great value, losing its impersonal and abstract character and acquiring ontology.

These two elucidations, that is to say the separating of the essence from the hypostasis and the identifying of hypostasis with person, were necessary in order to combat the heresies about the Trinitarian God. Anyone who identifies essence with hypostasis necessarily accepts the teaching of Sabellios. Basil the Great writes felicitously: "Those who say that substance and persons are the same are forced to confess different Persons only, and in hesitating to speak of three Persons, they find that they fail to avoid the evil of Sabellius, who even himself, although often confusing his notions, tried to distinguish the Persons by saying that the same Person changed its appearance according to the need arising on each occasion"¹⁰.

Since the fourth century, then, person has been identified with hypostasis, and essence with nature. These terms are suitable for expressing the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Of course we must add that they do not help us to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity. As the expression "mystery of the Holy Trinity" bears witness, we cannot understand this great mystery with our reason, but we can formulate it in these terms, even though they are completely inadequate, and therefore we often use apophatic expressions. Thus we can understand logically the dogma about

9. Basil the Great: Letter 52: To the Canonicae. LCL vol. 1, p. 333

10. Basil the Great. Letter 236. To Amphilochios of Iconium. LCL vol. 3, p. 403-405

the mystery of the Holy Trinity and not the mystery in itself, which transcends human reason and is a subject of revelational experience.

However, I should like us to look at the meaning of the person in the teaching of St. John of Damaskos, who summarised the whole theology of the Church on this subject. We need to do this in order to be able in some way to understand the terms which the holy Fathers used to express and formulate as best they could the relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. In particular we shall look at the meanings of 'essence' 'nature', 'hypostasis', and 'person' as they are interpreted by St. John of Damaskos.

"Essence" (ousia) is a thing which subsists in itself" and has no need of another for its existence". Likewise essence is everything that subsists in itself "and does not have its existence in another - that is to say, that which is not because of any other thing", nor has need of another to be formed, but which is in itself. Essence (ousia) gets its name from being. Therefore it exists of itself, it does not owe its existence to anything else.

"The nature of each being is the principle of its motion and repose". The nature is identified with the essence, since, according to St. John of Damaskos, "it is nothing other than essence". Thus it is from essence that nature has such a potentiality, which is to say its motion and repose.

The term 'hypostasis' has two meanings. Sometimes it means simple existence. In this sense the hypostasis is connected with the essence, and this is why certain of the Fathers have said: "the natures, that is to say, hypostases". At other times it means "the existence of an individual substance in itself", and it signifies the difference of one individual from the other.

It must be pointed out here that these two meanings are

given by St. John of Damascus because in the early Church there were two traditions about the meaning of hypostasis. Alexandrian theology associated the essence with the hypostasis, while Cappadocian theology associated the hypostasis with the person. Thus we see that in the Creed as formulated by the First Ecumenical Council the word hypostasis was used in the sense of essence, while finally in the Second Ecumenical Council the teaching was given that the hypostasis is connected with the person and is distinct from the meaning of essence. We see this position also in the Cappadocian Fathers, but we must point out that it was accepted by Athanasius the Great as well. It is a fact that we have no change in theology, but only in terminology. Finally it prevailed that essence is to be associated with nature and hypostasis with person.

In any case, essence cannot subsist by itself, since formless essence does not subsist, while in the hypostases, or individuals, are found both the essence and the intrinsic differences.

A 'person' according to the teaching of St. John of Damaskos, is "one who by reason of his own operations and properties exhibits to us an appearance which is distinct and set off from those of the same nature as he", that is to say a person is one who appears as somebody in particular among the many of his kind. And St. John of Damaskos mentions two examples to make it clear. The archangel Gabriel who appeared to the Panagia and talked with her, while he was one of the angels and belonged to a particular species, was at the same time a particular individual "distinct from the angels consubstantial with him". That is to say, it is a matter of a particular individual who belonged to a choir of angels. Likewise we have the other example, that of the Apostle Paul. When the Apostle was

speaking to the people, "while he was one among the number of men, by his characteristics and operations he was distinct from the rest of men". While he was a man, at the same time he was distinguished from the other men by the particular gifts and merits which he had.

It must be emphasised that, according to St. John of Damaskos, hypostasis, person and individual are the same thing. At one point he says: "hypostases or individuals", and in another place he says: "One should know that the holy Fathers used the terms 'hypostasis' and 'person' and 'individual' for the same thing"¹¹.

From this brief analysis by St. John of Damaskos it appears that the essence is associated with the nature and the hypostasis is associated with the person. And yet it appears that essence or nature cannot subsist without the person or hypostasis. When we speak of hypostasis or person, we mean the essence or nature with its distinctive features. And of course, as we mentioned before, the teaching about the person was formulated by the holy Fathers with regard to the Trinitarian God in order to clarify the relations between the persons of the Holy Trinity, because of the appearance of various heretical doctrines, which falsified the teaching of the Revelation.

2. **Person and man**

For man the holy Fathers mainly used the term 'anthropos'. They did not speak so much about a person, but about man. All the patristic passages refer to the great value of man, who has been created by God in His image and likeness, is the crown of creation and has a special purpose: to

11. John of Damascos: *Dialectics*, ch. 39-43. FC pp. 64-68

attain deification by grace. The term 'man' is scriptural and refers to the first chapters of Genesis.

St. John Chrysostom exclaims: "Man is God's profound animal"¹². St. Gregory the Theologian says: "He fashions man a single living being out of both - the visible and the invisible nature"¹³. St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: "That great and precious thing, man"¹⁴. Basil the Great writes: "A man thou art, but the only one of the animals to be deified"¹⁵.

I could mention plenty of patristic passages in which it appears that when the Fathers speak of the crown of creation, God's most perfect work, they call him man.

But I must point out that when they call him man, they do not simply mean by this his biological substance, but also the presence of the Holy Spirit in him. St. John Chrysostom says: "For a man is not simply one who has a man's hands and feet, nor one who is merely rational, but one who practises devotion and virtue with confidence"¹⁶. One does not only have to be born biologically in order to be called a man, but must also have the Holy Spirit within one. Thus a living and real man is one who is "favoured" with the grace of God. Otherwise, he is a man dead to God and swayed by various passions, one is like the animals.

Despite the fact that in speaking of God the Holy Fathers call Him Person and in speaking of man they chiefly call him man, still the term 'person' in some cases is applied also to man. And of course this is by condescension,

12. PG 48, 1029.

13. Homily 38: On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ, ch. 11. NPNF p. 348

14. The Making of Man, chapter 2. NPNF p. 390

15. Homily on "Take heed to yourself". PG 31, 212, 6

16. Catechesis, 2a. PG 49, 232

because they know that there is an enormous difference between God and man, between Creator and creature. God is uncreated, while man is created.

In analysing the subject of the person according to the teaching of St. John of Damaskos, we have already seen that in order to interpret the term 'person', the saint took two examples, one from the angels and the other from men. What St. John of Damaskos says is characteristic. He writes "A person is one who by reason of his own operations and properties exhibits to us an appearance which is distinct and set off from those of the same nature as he - like Gabriel... and Paul..."¹⁷. Of course these are taken as examples, but still we can say that they point to a reality.

In another case St. John of Damaskos ascribes the terms hypostasis and person to man. He writes: "Since men are many, each man is a hypostasis: Adam is a hypostasis, Eve another hypostasis, and Seth another hypostasis. And so on. Each man is a different hypostasis from other men, and each ox is a hypostasis, and each angel is a hypostasis. So they all have nature and form and essence and they have consubstantial hypostases, but they also have an individual and personal and partial hypostasis, that is to say, each of those contained in the same species"¹⁸. It is seen from this passage that man too is a hypostasis and, since the hypostasis is identified with the person, the term 'person' is applied to man as well.

We can dimly see that kind of correlation between man and person in some passages in Holy Scripture as well. In speaking of man's union and communion with God, the Apostle Paul uses the expression 'face to face' ('*prosopon*

17. John of Damascos: *Dialectics*, ch. 43. FC vol. 37, p. 67

18. John of Damascos: *Dialectics*. Ed. Papazisi, p. 24f. (Gk)

pros prosopon'). He says: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13,12). If we think of this passage as referring to noetic prayer, that is to say, to illumination of the nous ("in a mirror dimly") and to deification, that is to say, to the vision of God ("face to face")¹⁹, then we can understand that man can be characterised as a person, when he is united with God by deification and in the state of deification. Moreover he is also the real man. Furthermore, the Apostle himself, referring to a great trouble in Asia and to his deliverance with the help of God and the prayers of the Christians, says: "who delivered us from so great a death and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many" (2 Cor. 1, 10-11).

Today we use to satiety the term 'person' and 'personality' for man. Special care is needed, because there are many person-centred systems which give this term an abstract character, limiting the ontology of man to this self in itself, to the person of man. Furthermore there are psychological schools which speak abstractly about man's personality and think that this means simply his freedom, which also approaches anarchy. However, in the orthodox teaching we believe that the ontology of man is to be found in his Archetype, in the God Who created him, since man is made in the image of God. Thus "biological existence does not exhaust man. Man is understood ontologically by the Fathers only as a theological being. His ontology is *i c o n i c*"²⁰. P. Perhaps since there is this danger, the term 'man' is emphasised more than the term 'person' by some

19. John Romanides: *The ancestral sin*. Domos, p. 29

20. Panayiotis Nellis: *Deification in Christ*. SVS. p. 33f

of our contemporaries, who are afraid of the ill-timed and constant use of the latter term.

I think that we can use the term 'person' also for man with great care, when we make certain distinctions. One of these is that, as in the case of the term 'man', according to the Fathers we cannot simply apply it to all those who are living, but chiefly to those who partake of the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God, and so we can use the term 'person' to refer to those who are on their way towards deification by grace and are being deified. Just as "in the image" is potentially likeness and "in the likeness" is actually "image", so also man by his biological existence is potentially man and person. He will become a real man when he partakes of the uncreated energy of God. As God is Person, it means that man becomes a person when he unites with God.

Likewise today a distinction is made between the person and the individual. The term 'person' is used to mean the man who has freedom and love and is clearly distinguished from the mass, and the term 'individual' characterises the man who remains a biological being and spends his whole life and activities on his material and biological needs, without having any other pursuit in his life.

In the Fathers as presented by St. John of Damaskos there is no difference between individual and person. The holy Fathers identify person with individual. I think, however, that if we look at this view within the whole patristic teaching, apart from the verbal differences, we will find elements of truth. This means that we can use this distinction between individual and person when we wish to distinguish the man who is inspired by the grace of God from the other man who simply uses himself up with his material and biological needs.

The fact that we can apply the term 'person' to man as well, with the necessary explanations and distinctions which we have mentioned, is seen also in contemporary deified persons who, being partakers of the same revealing experience of the holy Fathers and having a patristic awareness, are using this term. They teach especially that it is at this point that the difference between Orthodoxy and the other confessions lies, as well as the difference between Orthodoxy and the other eastern religions.

One of them is Archimandrite Sophrony, who writes: "In the Divine Being the Hypostasis constitutes the innermost esoteric principle of Being. Similarly, in the human being the hypostasis is the most intrinsic fundamental. Persona is 'the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible... which is, in the sight of God, of great price' (1 Peter 3-4) - the most precious kernel of man's whole being, manifested in his capacity for self-knowledge and self-determination; in his possession of creative energy; in his talent for cognition not only of the created world but also of the Divine world. Consumed with love, man feels himself joined with his beloved God. Through this union he knows God, and thus love and cognition merge into a single act"²¹.

It can be seen from this excerpt that man is characterised as hypostasis-person, but in the sense that the person is the inner core of his existence, and is connected with his impulse towards God and his union with Him. We shall examine the ascetic dimension of the person, which nowadays is usually not examined, later in this chapter.

In all the works of Archimandrite Sophrony we see that God is Person and that the man who has communion and

21. Archimandrite Sophrony: *His life is mine*. Mowbrays. p. 44

union with God is a person. In general, all our actions should have a hypostatic and personal character and all of us should travel the hypostatic way. But even obedience is a hypostatic experience, while love too is a communion of beloved persons.

All of this shows that the holy Fathers used the term 'Person' to point to the particular Hypostases of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But they more often use the term 'anthropos', man, for people. Yet there are some indications that the term 'person' is sometimes also applied to a man. But this must be done with special care, for it is possible to give a philosophical and abstract character to the term 'person'. Properly a man and a person is one who has passed from the image to the likeness. In the teaching of the holy Fathers, to be in the image is potentially to be in the likeness, and being in the likeness is actually the image. In the same way the man created by God and recreated by the Church through Holy Baptism, is potentially a person. But when, through his personal struggle, and especially by the grace of God, he attains the likeness, then he is actually a person. Therefore we maintain that ontologically all people can be regarded as persons, and even the devil himself is a person, but soteriologically we are not all persons, since we have not all attained the likeness.

3. Contemporary interpretations-analyses of the person

Various person-centred and humanistic systems speak of the person, and various psychological schools refer to man's personality, which is free to make its choices. Contemporary theologians, having discovered that all these systems have an abstract use for the term 'person', have

undertaken to give theological dimensions to the person and to look at man's life within this interpretation.

In fact, in speaking of the person, not only classical but also contemporary philosophy give it an ethical meaning and say that that which constitutes the human person is the self-existent coherence of the spiritual energies of each concrete self, that man is a person thanks to the natural constitution of his organism, and so forth. As has been aptly observed, "different definitions of the subject which the term 'person' expresses in itself have been offered from time to time, but no one has given them sufficient consideration". Therefore "the attempts that have been made to define the 'person' are limited and inadequate"²².

Of all the interpretations concerning man as a person which have been given from the theological point of view I can point to two of the most characteristic, which give two dimensions to the term 'person'. One is more theological-philosophical and the other is more ecclesiological. I use the term 'more' because they are not completely separate from each other, as there are elements of truth in both interpretations.

Professor Christos Yannaras expresses the first. He gives us the definition of the person and its dimensions in philosophical-theological language. He says that self-consciousness, on the one hand, and otherness on the other, are what differentiates one person from another. These terms are used by the holy Fathers. For instance the term 'otherness' is used by St. Dionysios the Areopagite and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Yannaras writes: "We all understand that what differentiates personal existence from every other form of

22. Markos Siotos: *The Christian teaching concerning man as person*. Athens 1984, p. 123f.

existence is self-consciousness and otherness. We call the awareness of our own existence 'self-consciousness', the certainty that I have that I exist, and that it is I who exist, a being with identity, an identity which differentiates me from every other being. And this differentiation is an absolute otherness, a unique, distinct, and unrepeatable character which defines my existence"²³. But since this self-knowledge and otherness are not products of thought but of many factors which are being investigated by contemporary psychology as well, therefore the way in which the ego is formed and matures "is nothing other than the relationship, reference. It is the potential which constitutes man, the potential to be opposite someone or something, to have one's face-toward someone or something, to be a person" (pros-opon) ²⁴. Thus "we use the word 'person' to define a relational reality. The person is defined as a reference and relationship and it defines a reference and a relationship"²⁵.

I think these are the central points of this analysis of the person. They chiefly emphasise two characteristic points, properties, of the person, such as self-knowledge and otherness. And to be sure, these cannot be interpreted apart from reference, apart from a going and moving towards some other person. This means that the person does not know aloneness. It is not my intention to make a greater analysis of these points or more generally of the term 'person' in this sense.

In an excellent study of his, Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamus gives the ecclesiological dimension of the term 'person' and points out that it is not possible for us to

23. Christos Yannaras: *Elements of faith*. p. 29

24. *Ibid.* p. 30

25. Christos Yannaras: *The person and eros*. Athens, 1976, p. 19

see and interpret man as a person apart from his ecclesial basis.

Analysing the distinctive marks of the person, he specifies them as three. One is freedom. Indeed when we speak of freedom we do not mean it in the ethical and philosophical sense of the possibility of choice, but are referring to the lack of commitment to any given, even the given of existence. It appertains to the uncreated. The second element of the person is love, since "the only exercise of freedom in an ontological manner is love". The third distinctive mark is the "concrete, singular, and unrepeatable entity"²⁶.

We should point out that even these three distinguishing features which constitute the person exist only in God, since only God is self-existent, has real love and is singular. Man can become a person and attain that which is uncreated by grace, love as ecstatic self-transcendence, and "ever well being", only through his relationship and communion with God. Thus "patristic theology considers the person to be an 'image and likeness of God'. It is not satisfied with a humanistic interpretation of the person"²⁷. Therefore man is preserved as a person only in the experience of deification and in living the way of salvation.

At this point Metropolitan John analyses the ecclesiological dimension of the term 'person'. He sees man in two modes of existence. "The first is what may be called the hypostasis of biological existence, the other the hypostasis of ecclesial existence"²⁸. By analysing this point and in particular by analysing the sacraments of Baptism

26. John D. Zizioulas: *Being as communion*, p. 46

27. *Ibid.* p. 50

28. *Ibid.* p. 50

and the divine Eucharist, he presents the truth that man is born as a person through the sacraments. And therefore "the concept of the person is indissolubly bound up with Theology".

We have said before that these two particular analyses do not differ radically from each other, but they express and interpret two sides of this great theme of how man actively becomes a person. At the same time these two aspects also present the ascetic side of the subject. Self-knowledge cannot be realised and lived without asceticism, but neither can the ecclesiological hypostasis come into being apart from asceticism. Furthermore "The ascetic character of the ecclesial hypostasis does not come from a denial of the world or of the biological nature of existence itself. It implies a denial of the biological hypostasis"²⁹. Thus asceticism is essential for man's fulfilment and his journey from the image to the likeness.

Nevertheless, let me point out that today a great deal is being said about the philosophical-theological understanding of the person and about the ecclesiological dimension of the person, but there is not much talk about the asceticism of the person. I emphasise the word 'much' because there is mention, but I think not what there should be. The analysis which is being undertaken is certainly essential, but someone should stay with this aspect. If we do not give due emphasis to the ascetic dimension of the person, that is, to how man becomes a person, we cannot effectively help the people of today. I think that the holy Fathers, especially those called neptic, offer valuable teaching on this subject. If we refuse to look at it, we are rather making Christianity an ideology. Therefore in the following sec-

29. Ibid. p. 63

tion we shall concern ourselves with this important side of the subject.

4. The asceticism of the person

In speaking of asceticism we do not make it an absolute, and we do not make it independent of the sacramental life. The sacramental life cannot be understood without asceticism, nor can the ascetic life be understood without the sacramental. The rejection of asceticism, that is to say, of hesychasm, is the life proclaimed by the westernised Barlaam, and the rejection of the sacraments for asceticism is an attitude of life which the Massalians taught and lived. In Orthodoxy there is a close relationship between ascetic and sacramental life. But at this point we shall speak particularly about asceticism-hesychasm, because, unfortunately, it is being overlooked nowadays, with the result that we do not see the person fully.

We have said before that the person is the hidden man of the heart. Archimandrite Sophrony is epigrammatic and expressive when he writes: "Scientific and philosophical knowledge may be formulated, but the 'persona' is beyond definition and therefore incognisable from without, unless he himself reveals himself. Since God is a Secret God, so man has secret depths. He is neither the author of existence nor its end. God, not man, is the Alpha and Omega. Man's godlike quality lies in the mode of his being"³⁰.

Therefore no one can define the person philosophically, but it is an object of revelation. And this revelation happens in the place of the heart. There man grasps that a

30. Archimandrite Sophrony: *His life is mine*, p. 43

change is taking place and that he is changing from a mask to a person.

The revelation and living of the person is also called man's rebirth. Man is given rebirth by divine grace and becomes a person, or rather it could be better formulated that the person is reborn from above. "The person is reborn from on High. An exquisite flower unfolds within us: the hypostasis-persona. Like the Kingdom of God, the persona 'cometh not with observation' (Luke 17:20). The process whereby the human spirit enters into the domain of divine eternity differs with each one of us"³¹.

The person transcends the earthly, for it is born of divine grace. It is not a revelation of man, but a revelation of God. "The 'persona' transcends earthly bounds and moves in other spheres. It cannot be accounted for. It is singular and unique"³².

To be sure, it must be added that the person is closely linked with the uncreated Light and love. "God reveals Himself, mainly through the heart, as Love and Light"³³. The person cannot be understood without the revelation-vision of God and real love for God and man. The person does not know loneliness but he always moves in a relationship and lives this relationship. When a man discovers his heart by the grace of God, then he is truly and really a person.

This way in which the place of the heart, the core of man's existence - that which can be characterised as person - is discovered, is called hesychasm. It is the only method by which man is reborn spiritually. In using this meth-

31. Ibid. p. 42f

32. Ibid. p. 43

33. Ibid. p. 44

od one can also be helped by the sacramental life of the Church; otherwise the sacraments work in a punishing way.

I had a conversation with someone who presented me with a problem that had been created for him by reading my books. He said to me: "On the one hand you speak of the person and on the other hand you are always writing about man's cure and hesychasm. How do these things go together?" I replied that at this point one can see the close relationship of the person with asceticism. If the person is not cured, if he is not moving from the image to the likeness, he cannot become a person. Anyway, the meaning of the person is not philosophical, but theological. And theology cannot be understood apart from experience.

Next I would like to analyse two ways by which the person is revealed, the inner world is revealed and man becomes a person in reality. These two ways are not opposed to each other, but they express and manifest the same thing from different sides.

The first way is to be found in man's attempt - inspired primarily by the grace of God - to free his nous from logic, the surrounding world and the passions. Since the fall, man's nous has been confused, and therefore it has to be freed. This constitutes true freedom. The liberation of the nous from logic is done through hesychasm. This means that the man struggles to rid himself of the things which bind him, he does obedience to a deified spiritual father, practises scientific prayer, that is to say he tries to do spiritual prayer unceasingly, sometimes with his lips, sometimes with reasoning, he is constantly sober, watchful not to let any tempting image from his thinking enter his heart; and this method is called therapy. Thus the man is cured and proceeds towards deification - he throws off the mask of the passions and becomes a person.

This method which is practised by the genuine hesychast is presented by St. Gregory Palamas. We shall look at the text as it is reported by St. Philotheos Kokkinos, who adapts it to the first, as he describes the way in which St. Gregory Palamas attained deification and gained experiences of the divine life. According to St. Gregory, the nous must be detached from things outside, from its diffusion among things created, and return to the heart. As soon as it has returned, it sees the "hideous mask from its wandering below". Seeing this ugliness, it tries to purify it with sorrow. When it has removed this ugly mask, the mask of the superficial man, then the nous enters the heart and there prays unceasingly to God "in secret". Thus he acquires noetic prayer. Then God gives him the gift which is called peace from thoughts. The peace offers him humility, which is what conserves every virtue. From peace from thoughts and humility come all the other virtues, in the midst of which is love. On the threshold of these is the prelude to the age to come, and there blossoms the ineffable joy that cannot be taken away.

Spiritual poverty is the mother of freedom from anxiety. Freedom from anxiety is the mother of attentiveness and prayer, and these two are mothers of mourning and tears. The tears purify the whole content of the hideous mask. It is only then that the way of virtue becomes easier and the conscience blameless. And from there comes the most perfect joy, and the grieving tear is changed to being very sweet, and prayer is changed to thankfulness.

Thus far all these are the gifts of betrothal, of the pledge. After this ascetic effort the liberated nous, surpassing the mind, all that is perceptible, and fantasy, presents itself deaf and dumb to God and is illuminated. The man who attains illumination of the nous becomes a real, natural man,

entering into his true life's work and climbing the eternal mountain. And "what a marvel meets his view!" Without being separated from matter, he ascends by the ineffable power of the Spirit and thus "hears unutterable words and sees the invisible. And thereafter he can be and is completely held in wonder, even if he is away from there, and vying with the untiring singers of praises, he becomes another true angel of God on earth".

Then the nous attains the vision of the uncreated Light. To be sure, St. Gregory says that the Light is everywhere, but it does not shine in the same way on all. It is seen according to the man's purity of heart, but also according to the will of the God Who gives light. In any case, when a man's nous is illuminated, then "also many tokens of divine beauty are conveyed to the attached body as well".

Also coming from the vision of the uncreated Light is the habit of virtue, as well as inability or difficulty to move towards evil. From that comes man's theological word, his gift of miracles, foresight and insight. Above all, man acquires knowledge of all the future. The great benefit of this training is "the return of the nous to itself" and the return of all the powers of the soul to the nous and of God's energy to the nous, and through this the man comes back to that ancient and indescribable beauty³⁴.

In presenting to us the way in which the Panagia attained deification, St. Gregory Palamas at the same time analyses the path which man must follow in order to become a person. He says that in man, between nous and sensation, are imagination, reason and belief. Thus man has at his disposal, nous, imagination, belief, reason and sensation. Imagination, belief and reason originate from

34. Philotheos Kokkinos: *Life of Gregory Palamas*. EPE, p. 124-136

sensation. Imagination, belief and reason. But sensation is the irrational power of the soul and therefore cannot be lifted up and recognise God. Therefore it is impossible for anyone to recognise God and attain deification by the other powers of his soul and body. This can be done only by the nous, since it is the only organ with which man can recognise God. Through the ascetic method the nous breaks away from reasoning, the surrounding world and the passions, it enters the heart, unites in grace with the heart and then is lifted up to the vision of God. This results in man's cure, the deification of his whole being. And naturally in this way he becomes a person³⁵.

This method described by St. Gregory Palamas is what is called hesychasm - the only way for man to attain deification and become a person.

The s e c o n d way in which the person is revealed does not differ distinctly from the preceeding, but it is complicated, because it has a different beginning and starting-point. It is analysed again by the holy Fathers of the Church, because the method of becoming a person is different. In what follows I shall describe some stages in this journey.

By God's good will the man suddenly and unexpectedly experiences a Pentecost, Revelation. We see this in the Apostle Paul, to whom Christ revealed Himself at the very time when he was persecuting Him. By His manifestation God contracts a personal testament with man. Then the man realises that God is not an abstract idea, nor some person of the past, but is a living being. He also realises that God is Trinitarian, one essence and three Persons, because he sees three lights. He sees the personal character-

35. See further analysis in: Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos: Therapeutic training, p. 38-40 (In Greek)

istics, the particular ways of being, because the Son is Light incarnate, the Father is a Light which is the cause of the other two Lights, and the Holy Spirit is a Light which has its source in the Father but is not incarnate. This revelation of God demolishes all the ideas which the man had previously about God, he sees his past falls, and acquires true repentance, brokenness, weeping, in deep humility.

God's Revelation makes a man's prayer hypostatic-personal. He does not pray to an abstract God, he does not simply do a meditation, he is not busy with the transcending of good and evil, with the categories of the so-called cosmic and ethical life, but he prays person to person. He takes up again the Psalmist's: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" (Psalm 42,3).

Such a relationship increases repentance, because in this situation one sees one's wretchedness under God's light. St. Gregory of Sinai says characteristically: "If we do not know what we were like when God made us, we shall not realise what sin has turned us into"³⁶. St. Macarios of Egypt, referring to Christ's parable in which the widow lit a lamp and thus found her lost drachma, says that the same is true with man. "Truly the soul is incapable by itself of studying its own thoughts and discerning them. But with the divine lamp lit, the light dispels the darkness from the house. Then a person sees his own thoughts, how they have been covered by impurity and the mud of sin. The sun rises and the soul sees its loss and begins to revoke the thoughts that had been so mixed with dirt and squalor"³⁷. St. Symeon

36. *Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 221, 50.

37. St. Macarios [pseudo-Macarios]: *The fifty spiritual homilies*. Homily 11. CWS, p. 91f

the New Theologian says that if man does not see himself, he cannot be called a man, for he is an "ox" or a "beast"³⁸.

In this state he develops an uncontrollable thirst for perfection. He wants to attain greater knowledge of God, for there is no end to perfection, no limit to virtue.

And naturally the rebirth of a man, the discovery of his heart, the finding of the hypostatic principle, results in his love for the whole world developing continually. And this is expressed by prayer and sacrifice for the whole world. His heart is aflame with love. Then the man oversteps the limited boundaries of his ego and from love and with love he enters into the hypostasis of the other. He lives the kenosis of Christ to a degree, and Christ's agony in Gethsemane. He weeps for the whole world. In the lives of many saints we see this sympathising heart which they had for all creation, even for the devil. This sacrificial prayer, which takes place within the experience of seeing the divine and discovering the person, is called a royal priesthood, and all who pray noetically have what is called spiritual ordination.

It is essential to look at the ascetic dimension of the person, because we cannot understand the person from the orthodox point of view in any other way. When anyone follows the concrete method used by the Orthodox Church, he can experience just what a person is. This aspect is also emphasised by Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov in his recent book, and will allow me to make a reference.

Archimandrite Sophrony observes: "The Hypostasis of God escapes definition because it cannot be subject to any kind of determination. Not to be known rationally, it can be apprehended existentially and only in so far as God

38. SC 174, 222

reveals Himself to man (cf. Matt. 11,27; Luke 10:22; John 17:26).

"In man too, image of the Personal God, the principle of the person is 'the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible... which is in the sight of God of great price' (1 Pet. 3:4). The created person is also beyond definition. Scientific and philosophical cognition can be expressed in concepts and definitions, but the person is being, not subject to philosophical or scientific forms of cognition. Like God, the persona-hypostasis cannot be thoroughly known from outside unless he reveals himself to another person"³⁹.

What we can underline from this passage is that the person, whether in God or in man, cannot be expressed fully in philosophical and scientific terms, because it is beyond them. The person is revealed existentially. Therefore we can speak about the mystery of the person. The person himself reveals himself. And this is a matter of experience, revelation.

The fact that we realise that God is one essence and three persons is a matter of experience, of personal revelation. In other words, God Himself reveals Himself to man and offers him knowledge of Himself. The saints received the Revelation, reached Pentecost, experienced the uncreated words and understandings and later made this revealing experience known as best they could with created words and concepts, because it was needed for their time. Thus one cannot understand and experience the threefoldness of God by means of terms, in spite of their usefulness. It is a matter of experience. Therefore the Fathers came to the

39. Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov: *We shall see Him as He is*, p. 192.

point of saying that God is Threefold, having one essence and three hypostases, but in fact He is neither a monad nor a triad, as we conceive and understand these things. It is essentially a matter of experience, of participation in Pentecost.

Archimandrite Sophrony presents one such personal experience: "The light which appears in man when he believes in Christ testifies to His Divinity. Our spirit accepts the Lord Jesus as immutable Truth, authentically Holy. And this eternal Light begets testimony within us identical with the teaching of Christ. In this Light we contemplate the Father. We apprehend this Light as the Holy Spirit. In it we see Christ as the only-begotten Son of the Father. In it we perceive the Oneness of the Three. Praying to this God, we live the One Being of the Three Persons. But we apprehend and relate to this Oneness variously: I approach the Father in one fashion; I pray otherwise to the Holy Spirit; I turn to Christ in a different manner. An especial spiritual feeling is associated with each that in no way detracts from their Oneness of being, with each Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity we have to a certain extent a differing relationship. Closest of all we know the Lord Jesus through His incarnation, His becoming man, and through Him we are led to First-Being, which is true God - the TRINITY, one substance and undivided"⁴⁰.

In this passage we see that knowledge of the Triune God is a subject of revelation, of participation in Pentecost. By Revelation, as we have said, man sees three Lights, attains awareness of the common essence, of the Oneness of God, but also of the particularity of each Person. He sees clearly that the Father is Light, Who is the source of

40. Ibid. p. 170-171

the other Lights, that Christ is Light incarnate, and the Holy Spirit is Light which proceeds from the first Light, but nevertheless is not incarnate, is not embodied. The knowledge which the deified have of the Threefold God is experiential knowledge. This knowledge passes into words and terms of the time, such as essence and hypostases or persons. Thus the terms essence and person cannot provide the true knowledge of God, but knowledge *a b o u t* God. Therefore we cannot speak about the mystery of the Holy Trinity, since the Holy Trinity as a mystery is incomprehensible, but we can speak about the knowledge of the doctrine concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

This is the case with man as well. The term 'person', which is used also for man, cannot offer full knowledge of man, because it too is a mystery which is revealed to the understanding of experience. Archimandrite Sophrony makes the following observation in relation to this topic:

"When by a gift from on High it was granted to me to comprehend the ontological place of the principle of the 'persona' in Divine Being, everything naturally changed round and appeared in the opposite perspective; we are created beings; as 'personae' we are beings created potentially, not actually. I am not First-Being but a created image of Him. By the Gospel commandments I am summoned to actualise, to realise in myself, my personal likeness to God, as 'persona', to overcome the limitation of the individual, which can in no wise inherit the Divine form of being"⁴¹.

Here, among other things, are presented three great truths. One is that the revelation of God as Person, which is a gift of divine grace, also manifests the createdness of

41. Ibid. p. 195f

the human person. Within experience man sees his createdness, that he was made a person potentially in order to become one in action. The other truth is that man can become a person in action, that is to say, he can attain the likeness by keeping the commandments of Christ. The commandments of Christ refer to man's purification and to the illumination of the nous. And the third truth is that man must transcend the limits of the individual, because the individual, which constitutes a biological being, cannot attain the likeness, which means that man must change from an individual and become a person. And this happens through keeping Christ's commandments.

In another place Archimandrite Sophrony also sets out the way that one must follow in order to reach the Revelation of the mystery of the person. Since this text is very graphic and fluent, I shall quote it as it stands.

"Even if only 'in part', nevertheless, for the sake of the prayers of my father St. Silouan, the Lord revealed to me the mystery of the persona. Year after year I prayed prayers of despair. The Lord did not despise me, and descended in mercy even unto me. At first it was His gospel word that acted on me. This word, that proceedeth from the Father, took root in my hardened heart. My new life was born in suffering. To begin with, I was as it were suspended in the air, alone, outside the Church. I was completely ignorant then, but an invisible fire consumed me, and my soul in agony reached up to the Almighty to save me. Somewhere inside me a ray of hope appeared that overcame my dread of starting out on the painful path. This pain that I am trying to speak of is sacred for me. A strange miracle - the dolour in my heart brought moments of rapture to my spirit. I marvelled how God had created my nature able to endure suffering through which hitherto unknown depths of

prayer were disclosed to me. There were times when, gripped by pain, in a whisper that yet cried aloud in wonder I would exclaim, 'Glory to Thee, all-wise Creator'. Prayer delivered me from the cramped prison of the world, and my spirit lived in the freedom of the infinity of my God. Without this suffering I could never have understood the love that the Lord spoke of when He said, 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do' (John 14:30-31)⁴².

And this extract is revealing, mainly for three reasons. First because it is a contemporary experience, and shows the common experience of the holy Fathers. Secondly, because it presents vividly the truth that the subject of the person is a mystery, which is revealed by God Himself through the prayers of the spiritual fathers. Thirdly, because the revelation of the person presupposes a deep pain. It is connected with a light, which burns the inner man and leads him by an impulse to search for God. It is related to burning prayer and ecstasy, and in general to man's rebirth and the acquisition of new life.

From all these things it is clear that without asceticism it is impossible for us to understand and experience the person, which is a mystery. The terms define something and point out a path, but they can never replace the experience. In spite of their usefulness, they are completely inadequate.

Thus by means of orthodox asceticism, which has its place within the framework of the Church and differs from every other asceticism, man can attain the hypostatic principle, he can follow the hypostatic path and do away with

42. Ibid. p. 197-198

the "hideous mask from his wandering below" - he can really become a person. The person is not exhausted in philosophical definitions and theological analyses, but is experienced within suffering. A new being is born through suffering. Just as suffering is linked with biological birth, so also spiritual suffering is linked with man's spiritual birth.

5. The value of considering the asceticism of the person

It is essential and necessary to consider the asceticism of the person. If we do not look at the subject from this angle, we cannot have a good understanding of what the holy Fathers teach about it. Therefore the emphasis on the asceticism of the person is not a luxury for our life, but a necessity.

Without this orientation many dangers and great problems are created. We would not only not understand orthodox theology, but neither would we understand the contemporary problems which are arising every day.

In what follows I should like to look at three problems which are arising today and are creating numerous dilemmas, and which can be solved only if we look at the ascetic dimension of the person.

a) Person and eros

It is being emphasised today that the person is linked with love and that only as person can man have true and real love. We read that "Personal distinctiveness is revealed and known only within the framework of direct personal relationship and communion, only by participation in the

principle of personal immediacy, or of the loving and creative force which distinguishes the person from the common nature. And this revelation and knowledge of personal distinctiveness becomes ever more full as the fact of communion and relationship achieves its wholeness in love. Love is the supreme road to knowledge of the person, because it is an acceptance of the other person as a whole. It does not project on to the other person individual preferences, demands or desires, but accepts him as he is, in the fullness of his personal uniqueness. This is why knowledge of the distinctiveness of the person achieves its ultimate fullness in the self-transcendence and offering of self that is love, and why, in the language of the Bible, sexual intercourse is identified with knowledge of a person"⁴³.

There is no doubt that when man becomes person, as described by the holy Fathers, then true love also develops and is experienced. The person is linked with love. God is a person and He loves man. That is why St. Maximos the Confessor, following St. Dionysios, says: "Theologians call the divine sometimes an erotic force, sometimes love, sometimes that which is intensely longed for and loved. Consequently, as an erotic force and as love, the divine itself is subject to movement; and, as that which is intensely longed for and loved, it moves towards itself everything which is receptive of this force and love"⁴⁴. Thus person cannot be understood without love, and true love cannot be understood without the existence of the true person.

It is possible, however, for us to understand the person philosophically and abstractly, and by extension also to

43. Christos Yannaras: *The freedom of morality*. SVS 1984, p. 23

44. *Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 280, 84.

understand love as sensual and biological. That is why at this point the necessity for asceticism must be emphasised. Besides, even the character of marriage is ascetic⁴⁵.

Sexual love as a biological need is characterised by two passions, which "destroy precisely that towards which the human hypostasis is thrusting, namely the person"⁴⁶. The first passion can be called ontological necessity and the second passion could be called individualism and separation of the hypostasis. The first is connected with instinct and the second with death, since a man is born who is going to die. "All this means that man as a biological hypostasis is intrinsically a tragic figure. He is born as a result of an *e c s t a t i c* fact - erotic love - but this fact is interwoven with a natural necessity and therefore lacks ontological freedom. He is born as a *h y p o s t a t i c* fact, as a body, but this fact is interwoven with individuality and with death"⁴⁷.

This means that only when man becomes a person does he preserve love. And, as we said before, essentially the person is a revelation, a manifestation of the place of the heart, a rebirth of man. It is with these presuppositions that the Fathers of the Church speak both of person and of love.

St. Gregory Palamas writes that just as God is *Nous*, *Word* and *Spirit*, the same is true of man. Man too, created by God in His image, has *nous*, *word* and *spirit*. The spirit that quickens his body is his *noetic love*, "which issues from the *nous* and from the *word* and possesses in itself both the *word* and the *nous*"⁴⁸. From these things we see

45. Christos Yannaras: *The freedom of morality*, p. 164

46. John D. Zizioulas: *Being as communion*, p. 50

47. *Ibid.* p. 52

48. *Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 361,38

that so long as the nous is pure, so is the noetic love which is connected with it. And as far as that purity of the nous is a condition for man's cure and is connected with the whole ascetic effort which man puts forth, and as far as this is connected with man's rebirth, to that extent love too is not simply biological, but noetic.

St. Dionysios the Areopagite, who speaks about love, stresses emphatically: "real love is praised as appropriate to the divine"⁴⁹. And of course there are a number of pre-conditions which determine true love. When the powers of the soul are moved according to nature and above nature, then they experience real love; otherwise sensual love develops, which is an idol, or rather, a falling away from real love. St. Dionysios says: "Others, however, tended naturally to think of a partial, physical and divided love. This is not true love but an empty image or, rather, a lapse from real love"⁵⁰.

Consequently, love is linked with the person, particularly when the person has a theological infrastructure and interpretation, and not a philosophical and psychological one. The philosophical and psychological interpretation does not give us assurance that love is genuine.

All the holy Fathers move within this framework. St. Gregory of Sinai says that love is "a spiritual intoxication that arouses our desire"⁵¹. In analysing this topic he writes that there are two "spiritually ecstatic loves". One is within the heart and pertains to those who are still in the process of achieving illumination of the nous, and is connected with noetic prayer, and the other is ecstatic, which per-

49. The divine names, CWS, p. 81

50. Ibid.

51. Philokalia vol. 4, p. 222,59

tains to those perfected in love. Both loves, which are divine, "acting on the nous, transport it beyond the sense-world". Thus true love, which constitutes the person, is a liberation of the nous from the senses. And this is also called spiritual intoxication, because the senses too are detached from their involvement with visible things⁵².

This is the extended meaning of love in the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church. St. Niketas Stethatos connects spiritual longing and love for other people with humility, compunction and pure prayer. "Nothing so inspires the soul with love for God and love for one's fellow men as humility, compunction and pure prayer". Humility shatters the spirit, that is to say, it makes low the heart of man. Compunction purifies the nous and illuminates the eye of the heart, and pure prayer binds the whole man to God⁵³. About this St. Niketas Stethatos says: "Where there is love for God, spiritual labour, and participation in the unapproachable light, there too the soul's powers will be at peace, the nous will be purified, and the Holy Trinity will dwell within us"⁵⁴.

All these things indicate that we can speak of true love, when we have a real person. And, as we said before, that man is a true person who participates in the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God. The person is closely linked with the rebirth of man, the discovery of the heart. It is just at that point that we can speak of love. Otherwise, there are the sensual loves, which St. Gregory Palamas aptly calls the empty image of real love, the lapse from real love, as St. Dionysios the Areopagite puts it.

52. *Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 222, 59

53. *Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 118, 41

54. *Philokalia* 4, p. 107, 2

b) Person and freedom

Many people connect the person with freedom. No one can deny this reality. Furthermore, in the teaching of the holy Fathers, the image is closely connected with freedom, independence. And this is what characterises man.

Several errors are being made at this point as well. Freedom is taken in its moral and philosophical sense as a possibility of choosing good and evil. However, in patristic teaching freedom has a different meaning. The "gnomic will", that is to say the possibility of choice, is an indication of the imperfection of man's nature. Therefore man cannot have absolute freedom. Only God has freedom in the absolute sense of the word, since God is uncreated. No being which has a beginning and owes its existence to some other being is able to have absolute freedom, but it has freedom in a relative sense. "The authentic person as absolute ontological freedom, must be 'uncreated', that is, unbounded by any 'necessity', including its own existence. If such a person does not exist in reality, the concept of the person is a presumptuous daydream"⁵⁵.

Thus since man has been created, he does not have absolute freedom. But within his limits he can, as far as possible, acquire absolute freedom, only when he is reborn in Christ, when he becomes a dwelling of the Trinitarian God and a Temple of the Holy Spirit, when, that is to say, he becomes a person. Then, by grace, he becomes uncreated⁵⁶, indeed he becomes fatherless, motherless and without genealogy"⁵⁷.

55. John Zizioulas: *Being as Communion*, p. 43

56. Nikodemos the Hagiorite: *Interpretation of the 14 Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, vol. 2, p. 156, note 1. (In Greek)

57. *Ibid.* vol. 3, p. 332, note 2

Thus, in the patristic teaching and in the language of Holy Scripture freedom does not simply and only mean the possibility of choice and preference, but the possibility of the person determining his existence. And since by our biological birth there is no possibility of our living this out, therefore it is by spiritual birth, which takes place in the Church, that we acquire the real freedom. Moreover, it is by our own will that we seek this new birth, which is clearly higher than the biological one.

Because this rebirth is a revelation and experience of the person, we can also experience real freedom. However, neither the person nor freedom can be understood apart from the ascetic way. Freedom of the nous from logic and the passions, but also from the surrounding world, gives man the possibility of seeking the beauty of personal freedom.

c) Person and social problems

There are some who think that all that is written about the person is philosophical-theological, and unrelated to modern life. They think that much ink is being poured out and much time and energy wasted on a theoretical subject at a time when so many social problems are waiting to be solved. Indeed they are asking anguished questions. They say: What meaning is there in all this talk about the person, when in our societies there is such inequality, such deep suffering, when we are living the nightmare of war, nuclear disaster and ecological destruction? When there is so much rape on all levels of our society, how is it justified to be occupied with such a topic?

It is obvious that those who maintain something of this sort are defenders of the social character of Christianity or

are moved by other motives anyway. The fact is that they give priority to solving social problems. At all events, it is a fact that they are offering the solution to the social problems. I would like to record some thoughts in reply to these objections.

The teaching about the human person is an existential fact. When the Fathers busied themselves with theological topics, they did not do it out of philosophical interest, but because they were sure that distortion of the dogma about God seriously upsets the matter of man's salvation. Moreover, the dogmas are medicines which cure man and guide him to acquiring health. The same is true concerning man. Our occupation with the question of what is man, what is his ontology, what are his interpersonal relations, what is the depth of man's purpose, are topics which form the essential part of Christianity, but which also interest man directly. Moreover, the so-called existential problems have first place in contemporary life.

Analyses of the person are essential, because within this framework we can solve the social problems as well. A society cannot exist without man. Man is making our society and all the social institutions ill. A person who is ill creates various disturbances and is a divisive factor. The mask is what destroys the unity of society. If a man is not a real person, he cannot live in love and freedom. Societies automatically become dominated by tyranny and hatred.

I do not mean by saying this that we expect man to improve first, and society after that. But the struggles must go on in parallel, with priority given to the cure of man. Those who give priority to the social problems are unaware of the reality and are also possessed by a western notion of

how these problems are solved. They are possessed by the illusion that the improvement of social customs will bring the improvement of man. But the reality is tragic. For peace and justice to prevail without man being cured, without his becoming true man, would reveal the whole tragedy of existence. And then no one would be able to cure him.

The Fathers placed great emphasis on man. He is the crown of creation, the microcosm in the macrocosm, the epitome of creation. It is through man that all the other problems are solved. To be sure, it is possible that they cannot be solved generally and objectively, but man, through his rebirth, is not limited by them, he transcends them and in fact solves them within the limits of his personal life. The problems do not touch him, they do not block his freedom. Man reborn, as a person, exists and lives in deep peace, apart from the existing social disorders. He loves, in spite of the tragicalness of human life. He comes out of the prison of the senses, and he transcends even death itself.

The holy Fathers attach great importance and weight to the inner purity of man, to the struggle to attain inner peace and inner freedom. This inner state of peace and freedom comes through hesychasm and is what can be called godly stillness. From the great number of patristic passages I shall select the teaching of Abba Isaac the Syrian.

The saint writes that carefree and Christlike hesychia "is a higher station than that of the almsgiver... Almsgiving is like the rearing of children, but stillness is the summit of perfection"⁵⁸. He who has the care of many "is the slave of many". He who has forsaken all and cares only for the state of his soul "is a friend of God". There are

58. Isaac the Syrian: *The Ascetical Homilies*. Homily 4, p. 37f

many who concern themselves with the first work, but those who do the second, hesychia, are rare⁵⁹.

In another place Abba Isaac the Syrian is astonishing. He compares those who perform miracles and signs in the world with those who practise hesychia, who live in stillness, and he finds the latter superior to the former. Concretely, he writes: "Do not compare those who work signs and wonders and mighty acts in the world with those who practise stillness with knowledge. Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world's starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. It is better for you to free yourself from the shackles of sin than to free slaves from their slavery. It is better for you to make peace with your soul, causing concord to reign over the trinity within you (I mean the body, soul, and the spirit), than by your teaching to bring peace among men at variance"⁶⁰.

In what follows Abba Isaac explains the reason for this preference. He writes that many have accomplished mighty acts, raised the dead and toiled for the conversion of the erring, and have wrought great wonders; and by their hands they have led many to the knowledge of God. And yet after these things, these same men who quickened others, "fell into vile and abominable passions and slew themselves, becoming a stumbling-block for many when their acts were made manifest". And this was because, as he says while they were still sickly in soul, instead of caring for their souls' health first. And so, ill as they were, "they committed themselves to the sea of this world in order to heal the souls of others". Therefore they reached the point

59. Ibid. Hom. 21, p. 110

60. Ibid. Homily 4, p. 32

of losing "their souls and falling away from their hope in God"⁶¹. This means that occupation with social problems presupposes that a man has been cured, otherwise instead of solving problems, he creates still more. Likewise it seems that the solution of existential problems, which are literally tormenting man, has priority.

In the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas it is clear that all the social problems and all the irregularities proceed from the darkness of the nous. He says characteristically: "A nous which deserts God becomes either bestial or demonic, and after having rebelled against the laws of nature, lusts after what belongs to others and his greed finds no satisfaction; he dissipates himself in carnal desires, and he knows no measure of pleasure. He wants to be honoured by all, while dishonouring himself with deeds, and he wants everyone to flatter him and agree with him and co-operate with his opinions, and when this does not succeed (how could it?) he is filled with unrestrained anger. His rage and anger against those of the same race is like that of the snake. And he who was created in the image and likeness of God becomes homicidal and resembles the murderer Satan himself.

Here it seems that the darkening of the nous is connected with the fall from communion with God and with becoming like the devil, and this has terrible consequences for man's life. Since he is withdrawn from the laws of natural life, he is given over to greed, desires what is his neighbour's, pursues the satisfaction of carnal desires, without having any measure for pleasure, he desires the praise and honour of others, falls victim to the passions of flattery and of going along with the injustices and opinions of oth-

61. Ibid. Homily 4, p. 32

ers, is angry and rages and on the whole is like the beasts and the devil. All these social consequences are a fruit and result of the darkening of the nous. This means that when man tries to be cured inwardly, when he struggles to concentrate his nous and turn towards God, then he is also freed from the tyranny of social problems, but he also helps definitively in the solution of these problems. Therefore it is a primary necessity for man to be cured inwardly.

6. Conclusion

The theology of man as a person can play an important part in contemporary society. To be sure, the person par excellence is God, but man too, as created in the image and likeness of God, can become a person. This is said with essential presuppositions. In fact, the true man and true person is the one who is deified.

But in order to reach this point it is necessary to live the asceticism of the person. The Fathers of the Church give great weight to this matter. The person cannot be understood apart from Christlike asceticism, since indeed Christian asceticism is closely connected with the sacraments of the Church. If we do not look at the ascetic dimension of the human person, then we fail to see the patristic teaching concerning the person, no matter how many patristic references we may use. The patristic passages must be used and quoted within the whole atmosphere which belongs to them. If we do not look at the spirit of the patristic words, we will not be able to understand them. Only the letter will remain.

The teaching about the human person will solve many problems which are arising every day. Love, freedom, the solution of social problems, anguish and insecurity, the

eastern religions, dialogue, psychological phenomena cannot be cured and confronted apart from the patristic teaching about man and about the person. Therefore this reference to the person is a matter of life, the primary condition of orthodox theology and of orthodox pastoral work.



3

**The hypostasis-person
in philosophy and theology**



The hypostasis-person in philosophy and theology

A great deal of discussion about the person-hypostasis is going on today. Different interpretations are being given according to the outlook and views of each interpreter and there is a superabundance of analyses.

In the preceding chapter I presented the teaching of the holy Fathers about the person. In fact the holy Fathers used the term 'person-hypostasis' for God, with the aim of overturning the heretical views of Sabellios and other heretics, who used the term more to mean the mask. It should be pointed out particularly that the holy Fathers speak more of the hypostasis, which in any case is identified with the person.

According to Theodoros of Raith, "a hypostasis is something subsistent and essential in which the sum total of accidents subsists as within a single underlying thing and energy"¹. The term 'hypostasis' is derived "from the verb to subsist and to exist and underlie altogether"². While essence denotes only being, hypostasis denotes "both how

1. Athanasiou Nika: Theodore of Raith. Athens 1981, p. 212

2. Ibid. p. 210

something has and what sort it is"³. What we say about hypostasis is true also of person, because hypostasis is identical with person. According to St. John of Damaskos, "the holy Fathers used the term 'hypostasis' and 'person' and 'individual' for the same thing, namely, that which by its own subsistence subsists of itself from essence and accidents, and is numerically different"⁴. The hypostasis-person is an essence with distinctive features, since essence does not subsist without hypostasis nor hypostasis without essence. Thus the essence is what is common to all the hypostases having the same essence, while the hypostasis-person is the particular. For example, we can say that all people have common features, because they are people, but the concrete person has particular features, particular accidents which characterise him, and this is called a 'hypostasis'.

We shall come back to analysing these topics later, when we look at the teaching of the Church about the person-hypostasis. But here we want to emphasise that many people in our time do not understand the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church about the person, because they confuse it with the teachings of the philosophers. There are philosophers and psychologists who speak of person and personality, but they mean very different things. Here the saying of St. Gregory Palamas applies: "And if any of the Fathers says the same thing as those outside, it is true only of the words, but the meanings are far apart"⁵.

The confusion was created by the fact that in ancient

3. Ibid.

4. John of Damaskos: Philosophical chapters, chapter 43, FC vol. 37, p. 68

5. Gregory Palamas: Triads, 1,1,11

times the person was a cover of the being, it was connected with the mask which the actor wore in the theatre to perform a certain role. The Fathers, however, associated the person closely with the hypostasis, giving another content to the term 'person'. We must also note that even today the philosophers and philosophisers give a different meaning to the person-hypostasis from that which it has in the Orthodox Church, and therefore terrible confusion is created in the use of these terms.

What follows will help us to look at the contemporary conceptions of the person and to see how these views relate to the teaching of the holy Fathers. We need to think seriously and ecclesiastically about this subject. And of course, as we know, it is a very serious one, because this is the perspective from which we can solve all the social and personal problems.

1. The person according to philosophy

Although 'prosopon' (person) exists as a term in ancient Greek thought, it is not associated with permanence. Ancient Greek thought in its essence is "a-personal". "In its Platonic variation, everything concrete and 'individual' is ultimately referred to the abstract idea which constitutes its ground and final justification"⁶. In Platonic thought the person is an ontologically impossible concept, because the soul through reincarnation, by which it can return to life in a different being, is not permanently connected with one specific "individual"⁷. According to Aristotle, the idea of the person is ontologically impossible, precisely because

6. John D. Zizioulas: *Being as communion*. London, 1985, p. 27f

7. *Ibid.* p. 28

"a man is a concrete individuality but only endures for as long as his psychosomatic union endures - death dissolves the concrete 'individuality' completely and definitively"⁸. Thus the soul's return to the world of ideas and its absorption by that world, as well as the elimination of the body, as Platonism teaches, and the breakdown of the psychosomatic composition by death, which characterises Aristotelianism, create monstrous problems for the ontology of the person. The person as a hypostasis is impossible in ancient philosophy.

"Thus ancient Greek thought proves incapable of making a synthesis between permanence and 'individuality' and of creating a true ontology of the person as an absolute concept"⁹. Therefore, as we said before, the holy Fathers assigned a different significance and meaning to the 'person', associating it with the hypostasis. Furthermore, in the Church, through the sacraments and the ascetic life, man transcends death, which is nevertheless a challenge to the person. This is why we cannot base the teaching about the person as a hypostasis on ancient Greek philosophy.

But also modern philosophy, from Descartes on, referring to the person, associates it with its ethical and psychological meaning. Let us take Kant, for example, who says that the person is manifested when his acts are independent of the reality of the laws of nature. Max Scheler moves in this context. "He sees the person in the independence of man's actions, as opposed to the mechanism of nature, and in his personal responsibility. According to Nikolai Hartmann "Man acts as a person in accordance with the commands of his ethical hypostasis, commands

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid. p. 29

in which the spiritual values of life are embodied". Likewise, according to the philosopher Immanuel Hermann Fichte, conscience and freedom are cardinal marks of man's personality. Also other philosophers speak of the person; some of them, influenced by western theology, characterise the person in relation to God and refer to perfection of the person¹⁰. In general we must say that those in the West who speak about the 'person' interpret it in the framework of psychology, because they associate it with consciousness. According to them, a person is one who possesses consciousness and self-knowledge. Therefore western personalism differs radically from the Church's teaching about the person.

We must say that even those philosophers who associate the person with movement towards God and with the person's rebirth, nevertheless belong to western theology, which is a prisoner of metaphysics. For just this reason the teaching of the western theologising philosophers differs distinctly from the teaching of the holy Fathers, which has no room for Hellenic ontology and western metaphysics.

Also among the great contemporary philosophers concerned with the person-hypostasis is Martin Heidegger, to whom we shall make particular reference and present his views more extensively, judging them from an orthodox point of view. Because Heidegger criticises western ontology, and also approaches the teaching of the Fathers of the Church at several points, he is respected by contemporary theologians. We are not going to analyse all of Heidegger's theses, but mainly those which interest us on the subject that we are developing here.

10. See Mark Siotos: *The Christian teaching about man as person*. Athens 1984, p. 129f (Greek)

Heidegger was born in 1889 in Messkirch in Baden and studied theology, philosophy, and historical and natural sciences. In 1923 he was made professor of philosophy at Marburg. A blot on his life was that for ten months he was enrolled in the Nazi party, for which he was later indicted and lost his seat at the University. This, of course also shows the relationship which exists between ontology and political totalitarianism¹¹.

His classic work, which established him in the philosophical world, was "Being and time". It was published in 1927 and was concerned with the meaning of being. Heidegger is not an existential philosopher, but a philosopher of the meaning of being. In one of his statements he writes: "I must repeat that my philosophical tendencies cannot be classified as a 'philosophy of existence'. The problem which concerns me is not that of human existence, but it is the problem of Being in its wholeness and as such"¹². He tries to define what being is, what it means. Philosophy until then was asking the question what a being is, whereas he was putting the question of the meaning of being¹³.

Those who have been occupied with Heidegger's work have discovered that there are two great periods in his philosophical thought. In the first period he approaches being "in the light of human existence", while in the second period of his thought he does exactly the opposite, that is to say, he proceeds from being to man. In the first case he uses the "typical scholastical-metaphysical lan-

11. See Christos Malevitsis's epilogue to Heidegger's Introduction to metaphysics. Dodoni, 1973, p. 255-257 (Gk)

12. Ibid. p. 258 (Epilogue)

13. Ibid. p. 270

guage of the tradition", while in the second he mainly uses the poetical, mystical, apophatic. The metaphysical language proceeds up to a point, and from there on it has to be transformed¹⁴.

At the beginning of his book "Introduction to Metaphysics" he analyses exhaustively the basic questions of metaphysics: "Why are there beings and not nothing?" All the philosophers are trying to give an answer to this basic and fundamental question. Heidegger, analysing this question more deeply, says that the thought leads to another, more basic question: "what is this being?"¹⁵. To answer the question "what is being" leads to perplexity, because it approaches the incomprehensible¹⁶. Interpreting the word "be" grammatically and etymologically, he says that it is not the third person of "to be", but the infinitive, which does not mean "is", but "to be", just as to eat does not mean that someone is eating, but to eat¹⁷. Speaking about man, he examines the subject of who is man and not what is man¹⁸. At this point one can see Heidegger's originality and how he differs from metaphysics.

In order to demonstrate the relationship between Being and beings, Heidegger uses two German words: 'sein' and 'da-sein'. The students of Heidegger, interpreting these two words, especially the second, within the perspective of all his philosophical thinking, give them different translations. Sein points to being, and Christos Malevitsis calls da-sein "being present", that is to say the form of being which lives

14. Ibid. p. 267.

15. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, chapter 1

16. Ibid. chapter 2, p. 73f

17. Ibid. p. 260. Epilogue

18. Ibid.

in the world, and elsewhere he translates it as "man". Constantine Georgoulis translates it as "human hypostasis", and Yannis Tzavaras puts it as "to be here". I personally believe that *da-sein* is better rendered by the term *hypostasis*, because, as Christos Malevitsis also maintains, in the German language the word *da-sein* means existence, presence, and the related verb means I exist, I am present¹⁹.

So according to Heidegger there is a real relationship between being and the human hypostasis. "Man does not exist on the one hand and the being on the other; these two do not have independent meanings. Classical metaphysics made this separation, and with the abolition of metaphysics this separation should also be abolished. The being is neither a concept nor an object; no one can understand it, because it is its own source. But neither is man the 'rational animal' of metaphysics. Being belongs to man, and man belongs to being. Being calls to man, and man answers being. Being is this call; and man is this answer"²⁰.

In his book "Being and time" Heidegger explores the meaning of being. At one point in his book, referring to the inquiry into the meaning of being, which has been lost and fallen into oblivion, he points out that two partial questions must be answered. One question is: what realm of reality should be investigated in order to find the meaning of being? And the other is: what is the method that will further this investigation?

With reference to the first question he maintains that in order to find the meaning of being, one must investigate the human hypostasis. The human hypostasis has the ca-

19. Cf. Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1967 p. 27, note 1.

20. Christos Malevitsis, *op. cit.* p. 269

capacity to acquire knowledge that it exists, and at the same time also to be aware of the being of the other beings, that is to say, that they too exist, in an essentially different way. Here, in other words, we have the characteristic features of the human hypostasis, which are self-knowledge and otherness. With these two characteristics Heidegger stresses the other ontological essence of human existence as well, which is "to be taken out of oneself". In the human hypostasis the presence of being supervenes. Thus in studying the human hypostasis by the principles which he uses, we can see what is the meaning of being.

To the second question, relating to the method which we should employ for ontological analysis he says that it is the "phenomenological method". In analysing this method, he elucidates the terms "phenomenon" and "logos". According to Heidegger, the "phenomenon" "is that fact through which being is revealed", that is to say the revelation and manifestation of being in its true form. The "logos" is "expressing an opinion". Therefore the phenomenological method by which one answers the question of the meaning of being, constitutes "expressing or displaying the phenomena"²¹.

So it is obvious from what we have said previously that there is a relationship between being (Sein) and hypostasis (Dasein) and that through the hypostasis we can acquire knowledge of the meaning of the being, which lies within the human hypostasis. This view which Heidegger had approaches the teaching of the holy Fathers concerning man in the image and that man is a hypostasis, a person.

Heidegger differs from other existentialist philosophers in that, whereas they look at man substantially, he looks at

21. Constantine Georgoulis: *The encyclopedia Helios*, vol. 18, p. 504

him existentially. There is just as great a difference between substantial and existential as there is between ontic and ontological. "The ontic relates to what man is in his worldliness, while ontological relates to his bond with Being". When we speak of a substantial problem we mean the problem which is related to this existence of man in itself, whereas when we speak of an existential problem, we are referring to man's relationship, reference and progress towards Being. The ontological and the existential certainly have reference and movement, while the substantial and ontic confine human existence within its narrow limits²².

Analysing the human hypostasis, Heidegger says that care, which is differentiated into worldly care - when man comes in touch with the things which exist - and human care - when he comes in touch with the other man - makes up the being of man. This care which constitutes man's being is made up of three structural elements. One is "abandonment". Man feels that he is in the world, he does not know where he was before, he does not know where he is going, no one consulted him about choosing this life of his in the world. We can call this element self-knowledge. The second element is "ecstasis", which indicates that man "is always coming out towards the world, always going forth from himself". And the third structural element of concern is "presentness", which can be conveyed as otherness, which means that it is accepted that his being lives close to other beings, different from himself. "Existence is always with others; first one knows the others (the thou), and then oneself (the ego)". Knowledge of these structural elements leads man to the dread which will bring him to

22. See Chr. Malevitsis, *op. cit.* p. 259

nothingness. Thus, "beneath the experience of dread it will be seen how the things which exist will be able also not to exist. For even existence will be able not to exist. Even if it exists it will not exist for ever; its end is always immanent. Existence will understand that to exist is "to exist-towards death"²³. Deliverance from death is the deliverance of existence from dread.

Heidegger's philosophy of the meaning of being and of human existence is very important and interesting from the theological point of view. It interests us because Heidegger made a great revolution and a great criticism of the philosophical thought and metaphysics of antiquity as well as of his time. Philosophical metaphysics in reality regards man as an autonomous being, and what is most important, it exhausts the truth in human thought. It considers that it is only through reason that we can sketch Being. Heidegger proved that the truth is not exhausted in thought and conjecture alone, but it moves beyond that. Thus he gave priority to existence, which is by no means fully expressed in reason, but in its movement towards communion with Being.

We can look at the great significance of Heidegger's philosophy from this angle. Classical metaphysics, in other words, "mistook truth as a symphony of thought and object", while for Heidegger "the truth is a fact of revelation and not of symphony"²⁴. He expressively emphasises that "thought is a response to the call of Being", thinking does not beget, "but it is there to the degree to which Being is present". So when man is not thinking about being, in reality he is not thinking"²⁵. In his book "Being and time"

23. Ibid. p. 263-267

24. Ibid. p. 270-271

25. Ibid. p. 272

Heidegger repeatedly criticises classical and modern metaphysics in relation to man and the hypostasis, but also as to what is Being²⁶.

Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamos notes that Heidegger represents an important stage in the progress of Western thought, especially in the liberation of ontology from an absolute "ontism" and from philosophical rationalism, though not in fact from the concept of consciousness and of the subject"²⁷. Heidegger in his way makes a radical criticism of the scholasticism of the West, which exhausts the truth in terms of logic. And this is very significant and interesting.

Nevertheless we cannot misguidedly connect Heidegger's philosophy with the theology of the Fathers of the Church, because there is a great difference between them. That is to say, we emphasise its importance for refuting Western metaphysics, but we must point out the differences. Otherwise we may distort the orthodox teaching. This is very important because we know that unless the writings of St. Dionysios the Areopagite are interpreted in the orthodox way, as St. Maximos the Confessor did, they can be seen as agnostic, as unfortunately scholastic theology saw them. The apophaticism of St. Dionysios the Areopagite, and of the Orthodox Church in general, has no relationship with the agnosticism of the West.

I consider very important the observation of the Reverend Metropolitan of Pergamos John Zizioulas that "the use of Heidegger in the interpretation of patristic theology runs into fundamental difficulties. As pointers to these one would

26. See in Martin Heidegger: *Being and time*. Blackwell, Oxford 1962, p. 72f and 126f

27. John D. Zizioulas: *Being and communion*, op. cit. p. 45

have to pose among others the following questions: (a) Is it possible to conceive of an ontology outside time in Heidegger, or of an ontology within time predicated of God in the Greek Fathers? (b) Is it possible for death to be an ontological concept in the Fathers, who regard it as the last enemy of being? (c) Is it possible to regard the concept of truth (*a-letheia*), in the sense of a manifestation and outgrowth from oblivion (*lethe*), as an inevitable attribute of the ontology predicated of God?"²⁸.

These questions are quite interesting and show the difference between Heidegger's philosophy and the theology of the holy Fathers of the Church concerning being and concerning the human hypostasis.

First it must be observed that Heidegger himself also pointed out the difference between theology and philosophy, and therefore a Christian philosophy is not valid. In his book "An introduction to metaphysics" he says "a faith that does not perpetually expose itself to the possibility of unfaith is no faith, but merely a convenience... a daring attempt to unfathom this unfathomable question by disclosing what it summons us to ask, to push our question to the very end, Where such an attempt occurs there is philosophy... This is neither faith nor questioning, but indifference". Taking this position as his starting-point he presents the difference between philosophy and theology. "Philosophy is this very foolishness (meaning to question constantly). A "Christian philosophy" is a round square and a misunderstanding. There is, to be sure, a thinking inquiring pondering of the world of Christian experience, i. e. of the world of faith. But this is theology... For the original Christian faith, philosophy is foolishness. 'I philosophise'

28. Ibid. p. 45

means I ask: 'Why are there essents rather than nothing?' Really to ask this question signifies: a daring attempt to fathom this unfathomable question by disclosing what it summons us to ask, to push our question to the very end. Where such an attempt occurs there is philosophy"²⁹.

Yet the theology of the Fathers cannot be linked to time, as Heidegger's ontology is. According to the Holy Fathers, God belongs to the eternal, the angels and saints belong to the ages and man belongs to time. The difference between time and ages is not very great, but the difference between the ages and eternity is enormous, as great as that between the uncreated and the created. To be sure, the economy of God, that is to say the incarnation, took place in time, but theology belongs to the eternal.

Likewise it is known from the teaching of the Fathers that death is not an ontological phenomenon, that is, it is not a structural element of the human hypostasis, but an intervention in the existence of man and the world. Decay and death are a parasite of nature. Death is an enemy of man, and in the end Christ will liberate us from this death. Thus we experience the transcendence of death by the life in Christ. God did not create the world negatively, but positively, that is, without death. Death is an intervention. This is why it is not an ontological phenomenon: that is to say it is not characteristic of the hypostasis.

Heidegger affirms that the word 'truth' (aletheia) is made up of the alpha privitive and the word 'lethe' and points to appearing and emerging from oblivion. In his "Introduction to metaphysics" he writes about truth: "Truth is inherent in the essence of being. To be an essent means to come to light, to appear on the scene, to take one's place,

29. Martin Heidegger: *An introduction to metaphysics*, p. 7-8

to produce something. Nonbeing, on the other hand, means: to withdraw from appearing, from presence..."³⁰. But about God we cannot say that truth belongs to being and that manifestation is "a category of ontology", which means that its manifestation is necessary for its existence. We realise from the patristic tradition that the truth, such as love and justice, is not the essence of God, but His uncreated essential energies. God is not truth, since He is self-revealing from His oblivion, but He is truth according to His uncreated essential energy.

Apart from these points Heidegger's view of Being and of the human hypostasis is very significant, because with it he makes a criticism of all the personalistic systems of his time and presents the frames within which the human hypostasis should be examined.

The being present, the human hypostasis, is a manifestation of Being, and naturally the human hypostasis is marked by reference and movement towards Being. What follows will, I think, show just what the person-hypostasis is in the teaching of the Fathers of our Church. Philosophy, apart from the few correct pointers, is unable to come up to the full meaning and analysis of the person. This interpretation presupposes truth, that is to say revelation, manifestation, as it was given to the Fathers of the Church.

2. The person in Western and Orthodox theology

Many people today are speaking about the person. Some refer to it in the sense of the human person, which they consider very important for daily life, since people cannot be subjected to the mass, and others deny it or consider it a

30. Ibid. p. 136

heresy, because the Fathers did not speak of man as person.

Confusion is being created about the meaning of the person, because the problematics as well as the starting-point for discussing the subject differ in the West and the Orthodox East. In general we can observe that in the West the person is interpreted in philosophical and psychological frames of reference, while in Orthodoxy it is confronted theologically. This point is essential for the understanding of this serious subject, because if it is not confronted in this way, there will be confusions with many consequences. I should point out that the main topics in what follows are among the serious points made by the Reverend Metropolitan of Pergamos John Zizioulas. With penetration and sobriety he defines how the problems about the person differ for the Westerner and the Orthodox Christian.

In the West the person is spoken of within philosophical and mainly psychological presuppositions. In other words, the main characteristics of the person are considered to be self-knowledge, reasoning abilities and, chiefly, consciousness. When anyone succeeds in knowing himself and when he places himself in space and time, then, according to Westerners, he becomes a person and a personality. Some indeed reach the point of emphasising that the emergence of the erotic element, especially at the time of puberty, is what characterises the development of the personality of man.

Actually many contemporary psychological analyses connect the person and personality with self-knowledge and freedom. Unfortunately, many theologians of our time have been influenced by these ideas and think that when the holy Fathers speak of person, they mean what philosophy and psychology have in view.

The most dreadful thing is when such anthropocentric interpretations are also projected upon God. When we try to look at the Persons of the Holy Trinity with psychological interpretations, we distort the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church. "Western theology has worked by the principle that the psychological experiences of the individual can be transposed to the existence of God"³¹. This means that in the West theology (the word about God) is interpreted from within the economy (from what God created and did). And in fact one observes that "the West always had the tendency to project into theology, into the word about God, the experiences of the reality of the economy"³².

We see this clearly in the teaching of St. Augustine, who had a great influence on Western theology, because the Franks used his teaching in order to connect it with the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church.

St. Augustine, influenced by Platonism, tried to interpret the dogma concerning the Holy Trinity within Platonic anthropology. Using psychological interpretations, that is to say, starting from man, he characterised God as nous. Since God is nous, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are characterised as mindfulness (Father), knowledge (Son) and love (Holy Spirit). Within this perspective the Holy Spirit is the link of love between the Father and the Son, and thus we come to the teaching of the 'filioque'³³.

Indeed we must note that even St. Gregory Palamas, speaking of the Holy Spirit, says: "a kind of ineffable yet

31. Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamos: *Western theology*. Phototyped notes, p. 23

32. *Ibid.* p. 17

33. Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamos: *Lessons in Christian dogmatics*, part 2, phototyped notes, p. 26-27 (Gk)

intense longing or eros experienced by the Begetter for the Logos born ineffably from Him"³⁴. It seems that St. Gregory Palamas had been influenced in his language by the teaching of St. Augustine, but in reality there is an enormous difference, since St. Gregory employs this image differently³⁵. He characterised the Holy Spirit as eros in order to show the unbreakable communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, that is, by this saying "He manifests the direct proceeding of the Spirit from the Father, as well as the consubstantiality and common power of the Persons"³⁶. It is very characteristic that by this imagery the Franco-Latins arrived at the 'filioque', while St. Gregory Palamas arrived at its denial. And this observation alone shows that the Franco-Latins have different presuppositions from Orthodox theology. It appears, then, that the Western theologians are trying to understand the Persons of the Holy Trinity within the psychological analyses of the human person, as if God were in the image of man and not man in the image and likeness of God. It is in this way that Western personalism developed, which rests on philosophical and psychological interpretations. From this point of view as well Western personalism, which led Western theology into the heresy of the 'filioque' is to be rejected from the Orthodox point of view.

In the Orthodox East, however, the person is seen within theology, that is to say, from the Fathers' attempt to define the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. This means that the Fathers' teaching about person was not a

34. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 361, 36

35. Amphilochios Rantovits: *The mystery of the Holy Trinity according to St. Gregory Palamas*. PIPM 1973, p. 169, note 2

36. *Ibid.* p. 173

part of their attempt to analyse man and to characterise his capacities, self-knowledge and freedom, but in order to answer theological questions put by the heretics. For the holy Fathers believe that man is in the image of God, not that God is in the image of man.

The discussion about the person in God took place mainly in the fourth century, when the heretics appeared who were using the word 'person' with philosophical presuppositions. Until then people spoke about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, about the messenger of Great Counsel which became incarnate, etc., that is to say, using terms of Holy Scripture. Basil the Great introduced the term person-hypostasis in a special sense in order to combat the heretics of his time, and so did Sabellios, who used the word 'person' in a non-hypostatic sense, as a mask. I shall not enlarge here on this teaching of Basil the Great, because we saw it in the second chapter. What I would like to mention is that the person-hypostasis was first used with regard to theology, to the relationships of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Two troparia from the Midnight service are characteristic. The first refers to the tri-hypostatic principle of God. "The Seraphim ceaselessly glorify one tri-hypostatic principle, without beginning, eternal incomprehensible maker of all things, which every tongue also faithfully honours with chanting"³⁷. The other troparion refers to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity: "August Trinity, and undivided nature, in three Persons, inseparably separate, and remaining indivisible, divine in essence, we, the earthborn, worship Thee with fear, and we glorify Thee as Maker and Master, supremely good God"³⁸.

37. Paraklitiki, ed. Phos, p. 5 (In Greek)

38. Ibid. p. 7

The term 'in hypostasis' was used of the hypostatic union of the two natures, human and divine, in the hypostasis of the Logos. In one troparion we referred to the fact that the holy Fathers of the fourth Ecumenical Council proclaimed the Logos "to be perfect God and man, two in nature, and in energies, two also in wills, one in the same hypostasis"³⁹. We must also say that the heretics maintained that the will of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is hypostatic, while the holy Fathers taught that the will, like love, peace, etc. are natural energies. One troparion of the Church is characteristic: "Those champions of error, believing the will to be hypostatic, wrongly introduced with the wills also the Persons of those who willed. The Fathers, reproaching them, teach its proper nature". The uncreated energy and will act through the hypostases, but they are not hypostatic, but natural. Speaking of the common energy of the Persons of the holy Trinity, the holy Fathers "taught that with respect to divine energies the Persons are all one, recognising the energy and the will to be one and natural"⁴⁰.

Thus the hypostasis-person was used by the holy Fathers of the Church for the Trinitarian God, while Western theology, following the teaching of St. Augustine, interpreted these concepts within the framework of psychology. It can be added that the Orthodox theologians proceed from theology to the economy, that is, from theological teaching about the person they proceed to an interpretation of the human person, while Western theology is led from psychological interpretations about the person to theology, in this framework erroneously interpreting the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

39. Menaion for July, ed. Phos, p. 115 (Gk)

40. Ibid. p. 121

Man is in the image of the Logos, that is to say he is an image of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. In this sense the holy Fathers maintain that man too is a person. It is very typical that St. John of Damaskos characterises man as a hypostasis as well. For instance, Adam is a hypostasis, and Eve is a hypostasis, and Seth is another hypostasis"⁴¹. Thus man too, as being in the image and likeness of God, is characterised as a hypostasis-person, since through divine grace he can become a son of God by grace, can know the Father and become a person. This is said from the point of view that from the image, which is something given, one can reach the likeness, which is the same as deification. In so far as the person in the teaching of the Fathers has a theological meaning, it is only from theology that we can look at the human person as well.

So it has become clear that Eastern and Western theologies see the person differently. The former sets philosophical and psychological frameworks, and in this way Western personalism develops, which is a heresy, while the latter opposes to it the theological framework.

Since in many orthodox theologians Western personalism dominates, some people regard the analyses concerning the person with suspicion. To be sure, as we have explained above, they are right from a certain point of view. But when we speak of man as a person and a hypostasis from the theological angle, as part of the teaching of the Church about the image and the likeness, then we have the right to speak of the person. It is also from this point of view that we must look at the things that are going to be said in what follows about the asceticism of the person, and about the orthodox teaching concerning the human

41. John of Damaskos. cf FC p. 37f, 17 and 34f

person. If what follows is isolated from what we have noted in this section, then it will really be misinterpreted.

3. The theology of the mode of being

The effort to understand the meaning of hypostasis-person often leads thinking to philosophy, with the result that we fall in various theological errors. One of these is that in which it is said that "the hypostasis is nature's mode of being"⁴². I regard this phrase as significant, because it is the starting point of many other interpretations of the person-hypostasis which I think are not valid from the Orthodox patristic point of view. The terms 'hypostasis' and 'mode of being' should be interpreted in the Orthodox framework, in the way in which the holy Fathers of the Church expressed them. Besides, the terms are used in theological essays.

I shall try to explain as simply as I can, that the hypostasis is not nature's mode of being, but the hypostatic quality is the mode of being of the hypostasis.

The Cappadocian Fathers, and especially Basil the Great, brought into theology for the first time the phrase 'reason for being' and 'mode of being' in order to combat the views of Eunomios. Until then the Fathers did not speak much about essence either, because they knew from their experience that the essence of God is invisible. During their vision of God, the saints see the glory of God, His uncreated energy. God appears as light, which is His uncreated glory. And when the Fathers needed to speak of essence they spoke of the supraessential essence.

42. Christos Yannaras: *Life after death*. Synaxis no. 43, note, p. 35 (In Gk)

The heretical Eunomios, using Aristotelian logic, was safeguarding the singleness of God and His monarchy by projecting as essence the unbegottenness, from which the Son and the Spirit were excluded. Therefore the Son and the Spirit, according to Eunomios, are not like the Father in essence and energies. In so far as the unbegottenness is essence and the Son was begotten of the Father, it means that the Son does not have the same essence as the Father and therefore is created. The same applies to the Holy Spirit⁴³.

St. Basil the Great, in reply to the heretic Eunomios, interprets the words of Christ: "I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I" (John 14,28) in conjunction with the passage of the Apostle Paul that Christ "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2,6). If according to Eunomios unbegottenness is the essence, and the appellation of Father refers to energy and not essence, then we arrive at the conclusion that the energy is greater than the deed. And then many passages of Holy Scripture about the fact that the Son is equal to the Father cannot be interpreted⁴⁴. Of course many errors are introduced by this reasoning of the heretics.

St. Basil the Great, interpreting Christ's saying that the Father is greater than He, says that this "greater" can denote either the origin, or the greater power, or superiority in rank or weight. The Word of God cannot be regarded as inferior to the Father in power, rank and weight. So the Father is greater than the Son only with respect to origin or, as St. Basil the Great characteristically emphasises, "by

43. Pan. Christou: Basil the Great, PIPM, Thessaloniki 1978, p. 147 (Gk)

44. Basil the Great. EPE vol. 10, p. 114-116 (Gk)

reason of the origin"⁴⁵. Therefore he is pointing out that in this passage the word "greater" points to the reason of the origin, and to the mode: "... it is with respect to origin that He is called greater". And further on: "So what remains of what we said about the greater is the mode, that is to say, of the source and origin"⁴⁶. This means that the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds. The origin of the Son's existence is in the Father, and the Holy Spirit has His origin and reason for being in the Father. The Father is uncaused, that is He has no origin.

Therefore, according to St. Basil the Great, the mode of being of the Son refers to the way in which the Son exists, which is begottenness, and the mode of existence of the Holy Spirit refers to the way in which the Holy Spirit exists, which is procession. This means that the origin of the existence of the two Persons of the Holy Trinity is the Father and Their modes of being are begottenness and procession, which are called distinctive hypostatic features.

We also find the term "mode of being" in St. John of Damaskos and it is applied to the unbegottenness of the Father, the begottenness of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. In one characteristic passage St. John of Damaskos says: "For while the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, it is not by being begotten, but by procession. There is a difference between begetting and procession, but what the manner of this difference is we have not learned at all... it is because of the Father that the Son has everything that He has, that is to say, because the Father has them, with the exception of this unbegottenness, which

45. Ibid. p. 116

46. Ibid. p. 118

does not mean a difference of essence or rank, but a mode of being"⁴⁷.

From the last passage it is clear that the mode of being refers to the hypostatic characteristics and that the Son and the Spirit have the same essence as the Father, but the mode of being of the Father, which is unbegottenness, is not shared by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Everything else is common to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, but not the hypostatic characteristics, their modes of being. That is why the statement that the hypostasis is the mode of being of the nature cannot stand, because the nature is common to all the Persons of the Holy Trinity, while the mode of being of the hypostases is not shared.

The view that "the hypostasis is the mode of being of the nature" calls to mind and leads to Sabellianism. Sabellios maintained that God is manifested by various Persons in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament He was manifested by the mask-person of the Father, in the New Testament by the Person of the Son and in the life of the Church by the Person of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, according to this view, the person-hypostasis has mainly the meaning of the mask, that is to say the person is not associated with the hypostasis, but is simply an outer covering of the being.

But this statement cannot stand, and for an even more serious reason, which is drawn from what has been said thus far. The hypostasis cannot be a mode of being of nature precisely because, inasmuch as the mode of being is referred to the hypostatic characteristics (unbegotten, begotten, and procession), this means that the essence of the Son (if we can express it this way, since essence does not

47. John of Damascos. cf. FC vol. 37, p. 184

exist without hypostasis) is not begotten by the Father, nor does the essence of the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father, but the Father shares His essence with the Son and the Holy Spirit, as Father John Romanides affirms in an Orthodox way. There is a common essence, but the hypostatic characteristics (unbegotten, begotten, and procession) are not shared. Besides, the essence does not have hypostatic characteristics, but the hypostatic characteristics are actual characteristics of the hypostases, the persons. Consequently, the essence or nature does not have a mode of being, something which the person and the hypostasis have.

By way of concluding this important theological topic, I would like to underline five points which, in my opinion, are very significant.

F i r s t. This view is being formulated because the hypostatic characteristics are being confused with the hypostases. The hypostatic characteristics belong to the hypostases, but they are not absolutely identical with them. According to St. Thalassios we define the hypostasis as "essence with individual characteristics". "Thus each person possesses both what is common to the essence and what belongs individually to the person"⁴⁸. Therefore each hypostasis is made up of the essence and the hypostatic characteristics. And while the essence is shared indivisibly, the individuality of the hypostases remains immutable and irremovable⁴⁹. According to St. John of Damaskos, everything with respect to which a hypostasis differs from every other hypostasis of the same species and substance is called a hypostatic characteristic⁵⁰. And the venerable The-

48. *Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 330, 88

49. St. Thalassios, *Philokalia* 2, p. 332, 97

50. John of Damaskos: *Dialektika*, ed. Papazisi. Introduction p. 26

odore of Raith defines the hypostasis as follows: "A hypostasis is something substantial and essential in which the sum total of accidents subsists as within a single underlying thing and energy"⁵¹. St. Gregory Palamas teaches that there is a difference not only between essence and substance, but also between substance and substantives. Substantive things are not the same as hypostasis, since the hypostatic characteristics are not the hypostasis, but the "characteristics of hypostasis". The complete identification of hypostasis and substantive things was made by the opponents of St. Gregory. But he, basing himself on the holy Fathers, characterises the hypostatic characteristics as "enhypostata, but not hypostasis"⁵². Therefore the hypostatic characteristics, which are the mode of being of every hypostasis, are not identified absolutely with the hypostasis, since the hypostasis consists of the essence and the hypostatic characteristics.

S e c o n d. We cannot speak of there being an essence which is hypostatized and of "an antithesis between the nature and the hypostasis of man"⁵³. According to St. John of Damaskos, "there is no unhypostatic nature or impersonal essence", because "hypostases and persons are considered to have both essence and nature"⁵⁴. Therefore we cannot understand essence apart from the hypostases, and much less can we grasp the opposition of nature to hypostasis. It can be said only from the philosophical point of view, not the theological. To be sure, another thing is what is said by the Fathers, who tell us that there is an

51. Athanasios Nikas: Theodore of Raith. Athens 1981, p. 212

52. Gregory Palamas: *Sygggrammata* vol. 2, p. 157

53. Christos Yannaras: *Life after death*, Synaxis, no. 43, note, p. 37.

54. cf. FC vol. 37, p. 286-7

opposition between nature, as brought low by sin, in which death and decay have entered, and the hypostasis, which must be liberated. But this must not be confused with the nature or essence which, with the hypostatic characteristics, constitutes the hypostasis.

T h i r d. The essence or nature of God is entirely unknown, invisible, unseen and unshared by man. Man knows and shares in the energy of God, which is manifested by the hypostasis. According to St. John of Damaskos, nature is one thing, energy is another, action another, the one who acts is another. The one who acts, to be sure, is the hypostasis, but in addition to these things man shares in the substantial energy and power of God, not in the substance, or essence, in itself.

F o u r t h. The hypostases do not differ from one another in essence, but in the accidents, the characteristic features which, as St. John of Damaskos says, are "characteristics of the hypostasis and not of the nature"⁵⁵. We know that the essence of God is entirely unknown to man. We must add that the mode of being, that is to say the cause and mode in which each Person of the Holy Trinity exists, which are the so-called hypostatic characteristics, the unbegottenness, begottenness, and procession, are unknowable to man. St. John of Damaskos observes that neither the mode of being of the Holy Spirit nor the mode of being of the Son can be "grasped" or "known" by man⁵⁶.

St. Gregory the Theologian, referring to these topics and refuting the statements of the heretics, says that the Father is the Begetter and Emitter, "without passion and without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner",

55. Ibid.

56. Cf. Ibid. p. 194f

and the Son and the Spirit are the "Begotten" and the "Emission", which are their hypostatic characteristics⁵⁷. Likewise he says that it is impossible for man to express what it means that the Son is begotten of the Father, because if it were possible, then "it would have been no great thing if you could have comprehended it"⁵⁸. Therefore he emphasises epigrammatically: "and do not even then venture to speculate on the Generation of God; for that would be unsafe... The begetting of God must be honoured by silence. It is a great thing for you to learn that He was begotten. But the manner of His generation we will not admit that even Angels can conceive, much less you"⁵⁹. When asked by the heretics just what is the procession which is the mode of existence of the Holy Spirit, he asks them to answer what is the Unbegottenness of the Father and then he himself will analyse what is the Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Holy Spirit, at which time, as he says characteristically, "we shall both of us be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God"⁶⁰. So the hypostatic characteristics, the mode of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity are entirely unknown to man, because these are God's mysteries. When man tries to understand and interpret them with his logic, as philosophy and philosophers do, he is led to madness.

F i f t h. It may perhaps be observed that the term "mode of being" is being used in the sense of the particularity of every hypostasis from the other hypostases and mainly indicates the alteration and transcendence of biological na-

57. Third theological oration. NPNF p. 301

58. Ibid. p. 305

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid. Fifth theological oration. The Holy Spirit, 8

ture, as well as the freeing of the person from the necessity of nature, and not in the sense of hypostatic characteristics, as the holy Fathers use it. But this too creates other problems. First we must not create confusion in the terms which the Holy Fathers use, because then, by going in some way from the economy to the theology, which is the Western way of thought, we distort the theology. Then, if we suppose that asceticism "aims at changing nature's mode of being", the mode of being which determines the hypostasis is not its distinctive ontological mark, in which case, without understanding it, in reality we do away with the ontology of the person. Therefore great care is needed in the use of the terms.

Consequently it is unwise to use the phrase "the hypostasis is nature's mode of being", for it leads us into a multitude of wrong conclusions and nevertheless opens the road to Sabellianism. What we can say, because it has been revealed to us, is that the mode of being is the hypostatic characteristics, which mean the mode in which the three Persons of the Holy Trinity exist, that the Father is the origin of the existence of the Son, through generation, and of the Holy Spirit through procession. But we cannot understand logically even the knowledge of the mode of being of the Persons, for they are beyond logic. For this reason theology as experience is beyond philosophy, and philosophy cannot give any answer. That which the philosophy followed by all the heretics, Sabellios and Eunomios, considers illogical, is beyond logic and is revealing in theology, and what is revealing in theology is illogical for philosophy. What Martin Heidegger notes is revealing: "A 'Christian philosophy' is a wooden iron and a paranoia. Of course there is a mental process of enquiry into the world experienced in a Christian way, that is to say, the world of

faith. But this is theology. Only in times when they no longer believe in the true greatness of the work of theology, do they arrive at the disastrous idea that they can (by its supposed renewal with the help of philosophy) construct a theology or even a substitute for it, which will accord with the needs and tastes of the time"⁶¹.

The Fathers regard the way in which philosophy tries to interpret these theological questions as irrational and erroneous, and therefore they use apophatic terminology. The experience is cataphatic, to be sure, but the path to the experience, and its expression, through terminology, are apophatic.

4. The asceticism of the person

In the preceding chapter I analysed in detail the problem of the ontology of the person, especially when we look at it within Western philosophy, both ancient and modern. Man must cross into the area of the Church in order to be reborn and so acquire a second birth, what is called spiritual birth. This is achieved through the sacraments of the Church when they take place in the course of the Orthodox Tradition. And we know very well that in the early Church Baptism was preceded by asceticism and followed by an ascetic life, by man's effort to keep the commandments of Christ.

So when I speak about asceticism of the person, I mean primarily the transformation of man, which comes about through the keeping of the commandments of Christ. When man is guided from the image towards the likeness, he is

61. Martin Heidegger: *Introduction to metaphysics*, p. 37

fulfilling the purpose of his existence. Naturally, this fulfilment of man is achieved through the sacramental and ascetic life. The sacraments are not understood apart from asceticism because otherwise they are a condemnation, but neither is asceticism without the sacraments, because that is an anthropocentric view of perfection. This means that other Eastern religions also have asceticism - those religions which are limited to outward things or belong to the Eastern traditions about reincarnation and about discarding the body, which remains unredeemed. Thus man is a person ontologically, since from his creation his soul is associated with a concrete existence, without his falling into nonbeing and without reincarnation. But this reality is not being achieved, because he must be guided towards unity with God "in the person of Jesus Christ". This movement and completion is essential, because then man is fulfilled. God is Person. Man, who is in the image of God, must be united with Him in order to seek the "ever well being" and not the "ever ill being", as St. Maximos the Confessor says. For the sinner too lives forever, but as the "ill" and not the "well".

I have formulated this view in detail before. And indeed I based it on the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory Palamas, who speaks about the difference between mask and person. The saint says that when the nous is scattered by the senses in the world and makes itself a slave to the surroundings, it makes the man a mask. When the nous returns to the heart from its diffusion and wandering, then it sees "the ugly mask from its wandering below" and the deepest repentance begins. The more intense the repentance, the more the grace of God paints His likeness in outline on the image, which is something lasting and inalienable. So this clearly refers to the mask and

person, and it is emphasised that by repentance man discards "the ugly mask" and naturally becomes a person.

The ascetic dimension of the person which the Orthodox Church has and the view that the saints who have been united with God are *r e a l* persons cannot be based on neo-pietistic tendencies⁶². Indeed on the contrary this view is to be found in the framework of the Orthodox Tradition, since in this perspective we can see the meaning of the person-hypostasis. I could make many comments, but I will limit myself to the points which interest me on my subject here.

F i r s t. There is really a danger of associating the person with the personality, as various philosophers and psychologists in our time present and analyse it. The analysis of this aspect which has been made previously justifies my fears. Likewise there is the danger of the person being presented with ontic-static content and not in terms of dynamicness. Everyone today is emphasising that we are persons, and in the name of this reality they justify all anarchy and make life static. The person has movement within him: from the image he must reach the likeness. The grace of God and man's asceticism activate the hypostatic principle⁶³.

S e c o n d. The ontology of the person from a philosophical point of view is refuted by Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamos. As we have seen, his Reverence refuted in an essential way the things about a philosophical ontology of the person and emphasises the impossibility for philosophy to give a solution to this subject, be-

62. Christos Yannaras: *Orthodoxy and West in modern Greece*. Domos, Athens 1992, p. 486-487 (In Gk)

63. Archim. Sophrony: *We shall see Him as He is*, p. 205f

cause it requires man's rebirth, which comes about by his becoming a member of the Church through the sacraments.

T h i r d. There is no doubt that man is ontologically a person, from the point of view that because he was created by God, he cannot ever fall into non-existence, into nothingness.

St. Dionysios the Areopagite teaches that the righteousness of God, among other things, is seen in that He gives energy to His creatures according to their receptivity, as well as keeping all things in being, and does not let them fall into nonbeing. In the Orthodox teaching neither extinction nor metempsychosis is accepted. Also we say that even the devil is a person from the point of view that he exists and is never going to be obliterated and that he has freedom of movement. It is only that God limits his destructive work by His love and philanthropy. Thus also those being punished will exist after death ontologically, they will have "ever ill being". Hell is not the absence of God, but His presence as fire.

F o u r t h. In the teaching of the Holy Fathers a true man is one who also has the grace of God. This does not mean, as we said before, that the sinner ceases to exist, but while the sinner is carnal, he who is deified is a spiritual man. To fulfil the purpose of man's existence is to go from the image to the likeness. On this subject the holy Fathers are expressive. I should like to look briefly at the teaching of Basil the Great.

According to the Luminary of Caesarea, "the image" refers to man's nature, and the "likeness" refers to his calling and his mission. When St. Basil the Great refers to man in general, in nature as well as in calling and mission, he uses these two terms indiscriminately: in the image and in the likeness. But when he is referring separately to the

nature and the calling of man, "then he refers to the image in his nature and the likeness in his calling and mission"⁶⁴. Likewise, according to St. Basil the Great, the image points to man's potential to tend towards the likeness. Therefore "the image is potentially the likeness, the likeness is the image in operation"⁶⁵. It is characteristic that St. Basil the Great says: "after having become the image of Him who created you, you can run towards honour equal to the angels through good conduct"⁶⁶. Through good conduct, through asceticism one activates the image and comes to be in the likeness. Thus the deification of man begins with his creation in the image and likeness and is accomplished through the incarnation of Christ and man's communion with the Holy Spirit⁶⁷. In this sense it is said that man completes and fulfils the purpose of his existence through his rebirth into the domain of the Church.

F i f t h. The Orthodox views of the person, as we shall briefly express them after this, cannot be characterised as neo-pietism, because they refer to central teachings of the Church without which we cannot speak of orthodox anthropology. Pietism is a movement which developed in the protestant domain and is inspired by external acts of piety, which have no reference to the inner domain. In Orthodoxy when we speak about movement from the image to the likeness and about man's union with God, which is achieved through the sacraments and asceticism, and especially through partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ,

64. Olympias Papadopoulou-Tsanana: *The anthropology of Basil the Great*. PIPM, Thessaloniki 1970, p. 43 (Gk)

65. *Ibid.* p. 45

66. *Ibid.* p. 45, note 2

67. *Ibid.* p. 47

when we look at this teaching within the teaching of our deified saints, this is not pietism. Hesychasm has absolutely no relationship with pietism. Rather the opposite is true. That is to say, letting go of the teaching about the person given by the neptic and hesychastic teaching of the Church conceals many dangers of distorting the Orthodox Tradition and changing into an anaemic philosophy, which does not save man.

5. The Orthodox conception of the person

I think that the things which we have said so far show clearly the nature of the Orthodox Church's concept of the person. But it would be good, by way of a conclusion and summary, to set out the basic teachings of the Church about the person, because it has great importance for the life in Christ.

F i r s t. With certain presuppositions, man can be called hypostasis-person. When I speak of certain presuppositions I mean chiefly that the person must not be regarded as un-hypostatic and abstract, nor must it be interpreted with the psychological concepts of consciousness and self-knowledge, as unfortunately philosophy and psychology are doing, under the influence of ancient Greek thought and Western theology. To be sure, the Fathers keep more to emphasising the word 'man', and with this term they convey the 'image' and the 'likeness'.

But the holy Fathers also characterise man as a person. It is erroneous to say that the holy Fathers nowhere use the term 'person' for man. Characteristically I would like to refer to St. John of Damascus, who emphatically underlined: "Since men are many, each man is a hypostasis, as Adam is a hypostasis, Eve is another hypostasis, and Seth

is another hypostasis"⁶⁸. Likewise it is characteristic that in speaking about hypostasis and individual and person, and analysing the difference between hypostasis and species he refers to the examples of the Holy Trinity, the angels and man, as well as the animals and plants.

In God the hypostasis and person are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while the comprehensive species is supersubstantial and incomprehensible divinity. In the angels the hypostases are Michael and Gabriel and the rest of the angels individually, while the comprehensive species is the angelic order. We can say the same also about men. "So hypostases are Peter, Paul, John and the other men individually; and their particular species is mankind"⁶⁹. Therefore a man is a hypostasis and a person. And we can characterise him in this way.

S e c o n d. As a person a man can never reach nonbeing, but he is permanently associated with a hypostasis. This means that man can never be brought to non-existence or to metempsychosis, which the holy Fathers rejected as heresies. Even after the soul's departure from the body the hypostasis-person remains. What St. Dionysios the Areopagite says about God's righteousness applies here. God's righteousness, which is His uncreated energy, remains in all beings because "He assigns what is appropriate to all things; He distributes their due proportion, beauty, rank, arrangement, their proper and fitting place and order to a most just and righteous determination"⁷⁰. The divine righteousness is "that which will not permit confusion and disturbance among things but arranges that all

68. Cf. FC p. 16

69. Ibid. Cf. p. 17

70. St. Dionysios the Areopagite [pseudo-Dionysios]: The complete works. CWS. p. 113

things are kept within the particular forms appropriate to each of them"⁷¹. So God's uncreated creative energy brought all creation from non-existence to existence, from nonbeing to being, and the uncreated providential and governing energy of God directs the whole world and does not permit it to fall into non-existence. This is why the person-hypostasis is an ontological datum in man.

T h i r d. The creation and biological birth of man is not enough to fulfil the purpose of his existence. Man was created with the purpose that he should attain communion with God, achieving deification. This means that from the image he must reach the likeness. When he reaches deification, then he is really fulfilled. It is in this perspective that we must look at his fall from communion with God, the entrance of decay and death, and also his rebirth. His biological birth is not the end of his journey, but the beginning of his development until he reaches deification. Now after the entrance of death and decay, which are a tragic reality, they make things still more difficult, since decay and death create additional problems. Besides, we know that death is a fruit of the fall of man, but at the same time it is also a source of sin. Because of death, insecurity, fear, anxiety, and pain are created, which are generative causes of sin. Therefore biological birth is not enough, it is not enough that man is in the image of God, but he must transcend biological birth, death and decay and reach the likeness. Man, according to the apt words of St. Gregory the Theologian, is "a living creature trained here, and then moved elsewhere; and, to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God"⁷². He must not only be trained

71. Ibid. p. 114

72. Oration 38,11: On the Theophany. NPNFns vol. 7, p. 348.

here, but moved elsewhere as well, and this journey is called a mystery, which ends in deification, which takes place through the energy of God and the synergy of man. This is the ascetic journey. This is why it is necessary, when studying the person, to examine the ascetic aspect of the subject as well.

F o u r t h. Since biological birth is not enough, this is why it is necessary to be reborn. This spiritual rebirth happens within the domain of the Church. The assumption of human nature by God and its union hypostatically with the divine nature in the person of the Logos became the medicine for our salvation. Through Christ and in the Church we too can attain experience of our fulfilment. In so far as Christ is the true physician and the real medicine, according to the Fathers, it means that the life of biological birth, if we remain only in the image is an illness. Nicholas Kavalas, speaking of the great value of Baptism, says that through it we have attained "being" and "living wholly in Christ", which means that it has brought us to life, for it received us dead and decayed⁷³. The day of Baptism is the saving day, because "we are fashioned and formed, and our formless and undefined life receives form and definition"⁷⁴. At our birth our biological nature is formless and undefined, and so through Baptism it receives form and definition. Thus Christ is all things to man, that is to say fosterer and nourishment, he is the way, the power for us to walk it and the lodging on the way. In general, Christ is everything for the reborn man⁷⁵. Other holy Fathers speak of the companions of Christ.

73. Nicholas Kavalas: *The life in Christ*. SVS, Bk. I, 6, p. 49.

74. *Ibid.* Bk. II, 2, p. 68

75. *Ibid.* Bk. I, 4, p. 47

F i f t h. As we have emphasised before, at the Second Coming of Christ all men will be raised and judged for their deeds. The sinners, who did not have a spiritual eye, will not be destroyed. They will remain as persons ontologically, but they will not have God's participation. The righteous will have participation and communion with God. As St. Maximus the Confessor said, the sinners will live "ever ill being", while the righteous will have "ever well being". This very fact shows that there is no great value in our speaking of person and personality from the philosophical and psychological point of view, since this is a datum and abstract, and as we have seen, the devil too is a person. But there is great meaning in the fulfilment of man, his rebirth, the participation in the uncreated divinising energy of God.

With all these things, it seems clear that we should not involve ourselves in the philosophical view of the person. We cannot limit ourselves to such theories, but we must nevertheless look at the theological side. And when we speak of a theological side we mean it as being within the Church. Theology is also the faith of the Church. We can see the person complete through asceticism and the sacraments. Otherwise we do him an injustice, we distort him. The ontology of the person from the philosophical point of view creates a dreadful confusion in the Church of Christ and turns man away from the path of salvation. One can say that it constitutes a heretical position from the point of view that it selects one aspect of truth at the expense of the whole.

4

**The experience and terminology
of the person**



The experience and terminology of the person

The holy Fathers applied the term person-hypostasis to the Trinitarian God in their struggle against the heretics, who were the first to use the term, but in another perspective and with a different meaning. At the same time, however, in association with certain presuppositions the Fathers used the term person-hypostasis also for man.

As I studied this subject I found that today there are theologians who express erroneous views when they speak of the person. Some give the impression that when the holy Fathers used the term hypostasis-person for the Trinitarian God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they were doing it with philosophical thinking and thus expanding philosophy. It is indeed a fact that through the theological intervention of the Fathers the philosophical discussion about the person gained more substantial interest, and that thus through theology we have a reassessment of the concept of the person and a development of this terminology in a wider sense. But it must be made clear that the Fathers did not do this work by the criteria and methods of philosophy. They moved in a different perspective and on a different plane.

Likewise some other theologians are making another mistake. They are transferring the whole discussion about the person to an anthropological, ecclesiological and social plane, and in some way are confusing it with the abstract idea of "personality" used in psychology. In other words, they are trying to include anthropology, ecclesiology and sociology within the study of the Trinity. In some way they are confusing what concerns the Holy Trinity with created reality.

I think that this too is a serious mistake, because, as is taught in Orthodox theology, there is a confused difference between created and uncreated. There is no resemblance between them. This must be said continuously because many errors are being made in different ways. Man can reach deification, but by grace and not by nature, by transformation and not in essence.

In what follows we shall examine some of those views, because this will also help us to see the term hypostasis-person more clearly from the Orthodox standpoint.

1. Contemporary views of interpersonal relations

We have said that there are some theologians who apply the teaching of the holy Fathers about the person to created realities, whereas the Fathers formulated it in relation to the uncreated God. I have the impression that this absolute transfer, without the necessary explanations, creates many problems. To be sure, I have also pointed out at other times that the holy Fathers have used the term 'person' also for man, but in their whole theology they also define the presuppositions. The error of the contemporary theologians lies in the fact that not all that is said by the

Fathers about the person, in their effort to express by this term the experience of divine Revelation about the Trinitarian God, can be fully applied to man and society.

I could mention as examples some contemporary "schools" which make this mistake. But allow me not to do so, for two basic reasons.

First, because such views are supported by many in the country where we are and no one knows absolutely who introduced them and who are the borrowers. Of course in a special study one can come to some conclusions, since some who are speaking about these subjects are introducing into our country terminology and analyses made by various theologians and philosophers of the West. From personal studies I have come to the conclusion that the anthropological and sociological view of the Holy Trinity came from the Russian theologians of the Diaspora, mainly those living in Paris, and were brought from there into our country. Some of our own theologians, frustrated by the moralising and pietistic atmosphere which prevailed here, were excited by these analyses and, not knowing the theology of the holy Fathers, brought them into our country. Furthermore, some of them defined the characteristics of the person under the influence of the foreign philosophy which is called existentialist. So today there are many champions and supporters of these theories. One can say that so-called "Parisian theology" has become fashionable.

Second, I shall not undertake to list the particular "schools", because I do not wish to give the impression that I am making a criticism of the individual theologians. In fact it is not in my character to engage in negative criticism. What interests me is to do positive work, always presenting the interpretation of the holy Fathers in a positive way.

So without making special references to particular theologians, I would like to set out the most important imputation of the meaning of the person from the uncreated God to the created realities, which is being done unconditionally, without the necessary presuppositions.

Many are maintaining that the Church is an image of the Holy Trinity and trying to make their theological analyses within this perspective, arriving at some conclusions which indeed are sound in themselves. That is to say, using the theology of the relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, they analyse the relations between the local Churches. I have the impression that some of their conclusions, such as that every local Church is a whole Church without the unity of the local Churches being broken, are sound, but we can never arrive at absolute correlations between the Churches and the Persons of the Holy Trinity. And this is simply because the Church is not an image of the Holy Trinity, but the Body of Christ. True, Christ is one of the Trinity. And this always united with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but it is clearly said in Holy Scripture and the patristic texts that the Church is the Body of Christ. The Church receives the energy of the Trinitarian God. In the Church we participate in the uncreated energy of the Trinitarian God, but the Church is the Body of Christ and not an image of the Holy Trinity.

By extension there are many who say that man is an image of the Holy Trinity. And this, I think, when taken unchanged from Trinitarian theology and applied to anthropology, creates many problems.

In the first place, we know that man is created in the image of God. 'In the image', as it appears in the patristic teaching, has a different meaning from the "image". 'In the image' has one meaning and 'the image' has another.

Christ is the Image of the invisible God (Col. 1,15). Man is in the image of God; that is to say, he is an image of an Image¹. Christ is the archetype and prototype of the creation of man. Man is an initiate and worshipper of the Holy Trinity. This is why, as Athanasios the Great affirms, the Word was made man. Since He is the archetype of the first creation, He also had to be the archetype of the new creation and re-formation².

The view that man is in the image of the Trinitarian God is a confusion of the teaching which we find in the works of the holy Fathers, that man was created by the energy of the Trinitarian God, that he has a threefold nature, nous, word, spirit and that, living within the Church, he attains participation in the uncreated energy of the Trinitarian God.

No one doubts that the creation of the whole world, and of course also of man, is a fruit of the energy of the Trinitarian God, since "the Father does all things through the Son in the Holy Spirit". Likewise it is seen in the teaching of the holy Fathers that man has a threefold nature, for he has nous, word, and spirit. To be sure, at this point too there is need for special attention, because the nous, word and spirit in man are not individual hypostases, but energies of the soul, in which case they are not to be identified with the Trinitarian God. And of course no one denies that in our life in the Church we commune and partake of the energy of the Trinitarian God. Since the energy of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is common to the Three, and the uncreated energy is energy of the uncreated essence, and

1. See Panayiotis Nellas: *Deification in Christ*. SVS Press, 1987, p. 23ff

2. See Athanasios the Great, *On the Incarnation* 13,7

is partaken of "in the Person of Jesus Christ", because the one acting is the person, therefore man can become an initiate and worshipper of the Holy Trinity.

But all these things must not distort the view that man is an image of Christ, that Christ is the prototype and archetype of creation, that man is united with the Godman Christ, living in the Church, and it is through Christ that he partakes of the uncreated energy of the Trinitarian God.

I do not propose to complete the analysis at this point, because we cannot apply fully the teaching about the Persons of the Holy Trinity to anthropology, which will be studied in another section. What must be noted from the beginning is that it is not possible for the study of the Three Persons to be carried over to the anthropological study of the person.

Such an erroneous anthropology derived from the study of the Holy Trinity also leads to an erroneous sociology. Some people extend the teaching of the Fathers about the Persons of the Holy Trinity both to human society and even to marriage. They think that the way in which the Persons of the Holy Trinity are united applies both to human society and to marriage. There is talk about interpersonal relations according to the prototype of the Trinitarian God.

I think that this position is erroneous, since, as we have said, there is no identity between the uncreated and the created. The invocation of the Trinitarian God at the beginning of the Constitution does not indicate that the relations between people should have in view the relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but simply that we seek the grace and energy of the Trinitarian God.

We can also say the same thing on the subject of marriage. The love and freedom which should exist between the partners must be correlated with the Trinitarian God.

Of course the fact that the love between the partners should not abolish their freedom, nor should love and unity be abolished in the name of the freedom of each, is not to be correlated with the Trinitarian God, very simply because God's love is not personal, but it is His enhypostatic energy.

To be sure, the greatest mistake is made when the human passions and carnal relations, which have to do with states after the fall and will some time be abolished, are brought into the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. I think that such views constitute "hybris" in the ancient sense of the word, which is followed by the "penalty".

What we have said so far is not intended to exhaust the subject, but simply to define it. A broader analysis and various notes will come in what follows, because we shall see how the holy Fathers spoke about the Trinitarian God and how they spoke about man, as well as the fact that what is said about the Holy Trinity cannot be carried over unconditionally to anthropology and sociology.

2. The Patristic experience and terminology of the person

Although the holy Fathers, and especially the Fathers of the fourth century, the time of this discussion between the theologians about the person-hypostasis, while they were studying Hellenic philosophy, they were not philosophising when they were studying and defining the meaning of the person. Therefore they were not philosophers, but theologians in the full sense of the word.

As Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamos notes, in the early Church, at the time when an approach was being made between Hellenism and Christianity, there were two

traditions. One can be called a Hellenising of Christianity, also impersonated by the heretics, and the other a Christianised Hellenism, and in the persons of the holy Fathers³.

In fact the heretics had been strongly influenced by classical metaphysics and were trying to express the dogmatic truth within the perspective of philosophy. The heretics of that period were not slow-witted but were philosophising. That is why we can state that not everyone who falls into error is heretical. He may be foolish but not heretical, because the heretics had philosophical presuppositions.

For example, we can mention that the Arians made the distinction between essence and energy, but said that the Logos is not begotten of the Father but is a result of His energy. Thus they identify the uncreated energy with the mode of being. And since the result of the energy, that is to say, what has been energised, is creation, therefore they conclude that the Logos is a creation of God. Thus it is an attempt of logic to define this theological truth, without the revealing experience.

The holy Fathers, as can be seen in all their writings, attained the experience of God, they saw God in His glory, they lived Pentecost. Having the experience of revelation and knowing the terminology which philosophers and heretics were using, they made God-inspired formulations with the available terminology, giving it a different content.

So we must make a clear distinction between experience and terminology. Experience is something stable and unchangeable, while terminology changes with time. A change in terminology does not imply a change of experience.

The difference between experience and terminology is like that between partaking of the uncreated energy and

3. See History of the Greek nation, vol. 6, p. 546f (Gk)

glory of God and formulating it in created words and concepts. St. Gregory the Theologian stresses the phrase: "It is impossible to express God, and yet more impossible to conceive Him"⁴. He uses the word 'conceive' in the sense of 'cogitate'. No one can think logically of God. And when one participates in His glory, then it is even more impossible to formulate. This relates to the Apostle Paul's experience of revelation, about which he wrote: "And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter"(2 Cor. 12, 3-4).

Thus we understand well that the dogma is a different thing from the mystery. When the saints reach the experience of the glory of God they experience that God is light, but even then God remains a mystery, because they cannot attain union in substance. The saints' union with God, during the experience, is in energy and not in substance. That is why the Holy Trinity, even in this experience, remains a mystery. What can be understood logically is the dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Thus the participation in the uncreated glory of God, which remains a mystery even with the vision of it, is expressed by the holy Fathers in terminology and dogma which can be understood. Mystery and dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity are two different things. This is why the Fathers make different use of the terminology in every epoch. But when the particular meaning of the terminology is defined in an Ecumenical Council, then it remains unalterable.

The philosophy of the heretics differs clearly from the

4. Gregory the Theologian: Oration 28, second theological oration. NPNFns p. 289f

theology of the holy Fathers in that the theories of the heretics cannot be proven and verified, while the theories of the saints are verified. For example, we must say that the theory of the world of ideas, as it was put forward by classical metaphysics, cannot be confirmed scientifically. That is why today too classical metaphysics is not valid. However, the teaching of the saints that God is light is confirmed by experience. That is to say, anyone who wants to discover whether it is true follows the method which the Fathers lived, and he can, God willing, reach the same results. And this is proven medically as well, because a man in this condition is sanctified, and his body remains uncorrupted. This means that corruption is transcended, a thing which can also be attested by medical science itself.

Therefore the dogma expresses and formulates the experience of revelation, but the understanding of the dogma never means that the mystery of the Holy Trinity is also understood in parallel, for this mystery is inexpressible and incomprehensible even in its manifestation. The Fathers speak of the fact that the saints see invisibly and hear inaudibly and participate unpartakingly and understand God "unwittingly".

These basic truths which have been set out thus far will be analysed in greater breadth in what follows. But they needed to be said initially in order for us to be able to understand better what is to follow.

3. God is experience

In the whole biblico-patristic tradition it is evident that God is not an object of conjecture and logical understanding, but a matter of participation, of revelation, that is to say, of experience. Of course when we speak of experi-

ence we do not mean individual experience such as we find in Eastern religions, but the experience of the Church, as the Prophets, Apostles and the deified of all times lived it. The philosophers usually make conjectures with their minds, while the Fathers formulate what they have seen and heard as far as it can be formulated. In hesychastic theology, as St. Gregory Palamas expresses it and develops it more extensively, one can see the method which the saints employ in order to participate in the glory of God. They renounce association with the world and creation, they live the apophatic experience, that is to say, the nous returns to the heart from its diffusion in the surroundings and created things, and from there it ascends to God. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his work "The life of Moses" presents this journey analytically⁵.

The fourth century Fathers, in parallel with the dogmatic discussion about the Persons of the Holy Trinity, spoke of the way of experiencing and of participating in the Trinitarian God. And this way is purification of the heart. But they did not do this under the influence of neo-platonism, as some people wish to maintain. The whole of Holy Scripture speaks of man's purification and his participation in the glory of God. It is true that deification is not spoken of in Holy Scripture, but other terms are found there, such as glorification, likeness, etc.

Furthermore, there is a great difference between the teaching of the Holy Fathers and neo-platonism on the subject of purification and illumination. For the neo-Platonists, purification is the discarding of what pertains to desire and anger, and illumination is knowledge of the archetypes of

5. CWS 1978

beings. In general, salvation is the soul's return to the world of ideas. These views have nothing to do with the holy Fathers' teaching about purification and illumination. For the holy Fathers purification is the dismissal of all evil thoughts from the heart and their sojourn in the rational, and illumination is enlightenment of the nous by the grace of God. The method of purification and illumination of the heart and nous is called hesychasm.

It is said from this point of view that the holy Fathers were not philosophers, but theologians and men who saw God. They did not make conjectures or imagine God, but they saw Him, because they had purified themselves from passions and had discarded fantasy. It is not possible to attain the vision of God without experiencing that God is uncreated, that is to say, that He is not to be confused with creatures. Only one who thinks with logic can come to the conclusion that Christ is a creature.

I consider important and orthodox the view of Father John Romanides as he formulated it in a spoken sermon. When he makes the distinction between dogma and experience and analyses how dogma and experience are two different things, he says:

"He who reaches deification knows experientially that the Word is uncreated, that glory is uncreated, that the Father is uncreated, the Spirit is uncreated, the Spirit is a hypostasis, etc. These things belong to experiential theology.

"In which case another thing is the experience of deification which man has before him, living it within the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and he knows that the glory is uncreated, the energies are uncreated, that he does not see essence, in the glory he distinguishes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"It is true that the names themselves are not God. One sees light, light, light. Light of light, light incarnate. And another light not incarnate, which is light from the first light. So the two lights are from the first light, the one has become incarnate, the other is not incarnate. And this is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"And the fact that the one light became incarnate and the other two lights are not incarnate, means that the three lights differ from one another in this way. This requires some formulation, expression, so that the catechumen, who has no experience of deification, may know about this matter".

This teaching of Father John Romanides, which I consider very important and orthodox, is quite interesting. He shows that experience and its formulation in words, for anti-heretical but also catechetical reasons, are two different things. Sometimes the experience is formulated in order to combat the heresies and sometimes to catechise the catechumens, to give them the right orientation so that they may some time arrive at their own experience. For if one does not take the appropriate medicines, one can never be cured. And if one does not walk the true path, one will never end at the place where one wants to go.

Thus in the vision of God the saints see three lights. At the same time they also see the difference between them, because one is the source of the other two, the second comes from the first, but has a human nature, so that the body too is a source of the uncreated Light, and the third comes from the first, but has no human nature. They have formulated this experience in the terms unbegotten, begotten and proceeding, which are the modes of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Therefore the phrase "mode of being", which the Fathers use, has no relationship with the Sabel-

lian views. They formulated this experience in the terms person-hypostasis, mode of being, etc. We shall look at this further on.

We can look at some examples of this kind in Holy Scripture.

First we should remind ourselves of the great event of Christ's Transfiguration. The three disciples on Mount Tabor saw the Threefold God as light. The Godman Christ "was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun" (Matt. 17,2). Here we observe that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who assumed human nature, showed His divinity, that is to say, that He is light, like the Father, as well as the fact that His human body is also a source of uncreated grace. At the same time the disciples also saw a "bright cloud" which "overshadowed them" (Matt. 17,5), and this cloud, according to the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus also the Holy Spirit is light, but has no body, not being incarnate. Moreover in the cloud the voice of the Father was heard saying "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him" (Matt. 17,5). This is the greatest moment of the vision of God. The Father is hidden in the bright cloud and proclaims that Christ is His Son, that is to say, was begotten of Him.

In the event of the Transfiguration of Christ we meet with the truth that God is a matter of experience, an experience of the threefoldness of God as three lights, that although they have the same energy, which shows the same uncreated nature, at the same time there is also a difference. Christ has human nature, the Father is the source of the two others, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father but has no human nature.

We find the same experience also in the Protomartyr

Stephen, during his defence before the Sanhedrin of the Jews. It is written in the Acts of the Apostles: "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" (Acts 7, 55-56).

The Protomartyr Stephen saw the glory of God. This glory is the light. At the same time he saw Jesus, the Son of man, that is, the Godman Christ "at the right hand of God", the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who was made man. The source of the Second Person is the first glory, the Father. It is in this sense that we should interpret "on the right hand of the Father". It shows that the Father is the source of the birth of the Son. And of course the Protomartyr Stephen saw the glory of God, Jesus Christ in glory, that is to say he saw this great vision of God "being full of the Holy Spirit". Through communion with the Holy Spirit, through the light of the Holy Spirit he saw the glory of God. The words of the Psalm apply here: "In Thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36, 9).

It is within this perspective that we should look at many passages of Holy Scripture which speak of the fact that God is light. I would like just to cite the passage in James the brother of God, in which he says: "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren: every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1,17).

The holy Fathers had the same experience as the Holy Apostles. Moreover, St. Gregory Palamas' words are well known: "Is it not this, that saving perfection, in the realm of knowledge and doctrine, consists in having the same mind as the Prophets, Apostles and all the Fathers, through

whom the Holy Spirit bears witness that they spoke about God and His creatures"⁶.

St. Gregory the Theologian and Basil the Great, who contributed to the final use of the terms person and hypostasis, had great experiences, as is seen clearly in their works.

What should be emphasised is that Basil the Great, using the terms of the philosophers and philosophisers and charging them with another meaning and sense, had personal experience. He did not proceed by conjecture, but was guided by the revelation which he had received from God. This is why these terms with their special characteristic no longer change significantly.

But I would like in what follows to go in greater detail into the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian, which shows that the saints theologise not in a philosophical way, but through experience. They speak within the Revelation. The things to which we shall refer are characteristic, because they establish just what is orthodox theology, that it differs from philosophy, and moreover they show how to theologise in an orthodox way.

4. The vision of God and the theology of the Holy Trinity

In every epoch there are two ways in which men theologise. One is conjectural and the other is through experience and revelation. The philosophers and philosophising theologians use the first way, while the holy Fathers use the second. It is well known that the heretics who try to understand everything through logic express "hellenising

6. Triads: 2,1, 42

Christianity", while the holy Fathers who followed a different method express "christianising Hellenism", for they have experience of God, and this experience is formulated in terms of the Greek language.

The difference between these two traditions is also seen in the eleventh century between St. Symeon the New Theologian and Metropolitan Stephen of Nikomedia. Their dialogue shows clearly the difference between conjectural and experiential theology on the subject of the Holy Trinity which concerns us.

St. Symeon was loved by the people of his time and was noted for the wisdom of spirit which he had, for, according to Niketas Stethatos, who reports the discussion with Stephen of Nikomedia, he was wise in spirit, had true knowledge of the spirit, but with that "he was also honoured as a saint beyond all men".

Stephen of Nikomedia, who had resigned the bishop's seat and remained close to the Patriarch, was known for his mental faculties. He was "a man superior to the masses in speech and knowledge", he had the ability to answer various questions and problems which they submitted to him in "abundance of words and with a ready tongue". Stephen enjoyed a great reputation for his learning, but we mean human learning, philosophical training.

Thus the difference between a Prophet and a philosopher appears in the persons of these two men. St. Symeon based himself on revelation and experience, while Stephen of Nikomedia based himself on logic. This resulted in Stephen's underrating St. Symeon, calling him "illiterate, a complete upstart who would remain silent and unable to utter one word when surrounded by men wise in the art of literary criticism".

Stephen, possessed of arrogance because of his mental

abilities, but also jealous because of the fact that the people loved and honoured St. Symeon the New Theologian, looked for a chance to humiliate him and prove that he really was illiterate on the topics of orthodox theology. And he found his opportunity with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He thought that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was a subject of logical understanding and scholastic analysis and not a result of experience. This was his basic thought, but in the end, as we shall see, he was humiliated by St. Symeon.

Stephen met St. Symeon on the upper floor of the patriarch's palace and with great hypocrisy asked him to answer a question concerning the Trinity. To read the dialogue which they had is to see his hypocritical way of approach, because he praised him, while having other things in his mind, he called him most godly and assured him that he had long wanted to talk with him because he was devoting his time to the true vision of God. Of course he said all these things "assuming the mask of friendship".

After his introductory words he put the question of how he distinguished the Son from the Father, by concept or by reality. He said to him: "Tell me: how do you separate the Son from the Father, by a rational or a real distinction?" This question was designed to incriminate St. Symeon, because Stephen believed that he would not be in a position to answer whether the Son is separated from the Father in a real way or it is just in the thought, whether, that is, there is a real separation or whether it is in our own thought. Of course this was intended to catch St. Symeon and arouse laughter at his expense.

First St. Symeon replied that the answer to such a question is given by the prelates who know the mysteries of God, while he himself and others like him have to hear from the teachers and accept in silence the words of those

who are wiser. Then he said to him that he, Stephen, should have taught him, and taught him particularly how to be humble-minded and to grieve over his sins and not to inquire with curiosity into the higher mysteries. Then St. Symeon said that if Stephen wanted to learn what are God's gifts of God which are given to the humble, he (St. Symeon) would answer, but since he did not have the gift of eloquent speech, he would pray and God would reveal to him the answer, which he would send him in writing.

These words of St. Symeon are characteristic and expressive. He does not blame him, nor disparage him. With subtle and discreet words he suggests to Stephen of Nikomedia what are his own duties as well as the fact that these topics are subjects of revelation, given by God to the pure in heart. Thus theology is revelation, it is experience.

As soon as he heard these words of St. Symeon's, Stephen smiled and made fun of the saint, saying "and it is my anxious desire to receive your vision from you". He was glad that the answer would be sent to him in writing, because in this way he would find the opportunity to criticise the saint still more. In the written word the mistakes would be easier to find.

In order to answer this theological question St. Symeon shut himself into his cell, gave himself over to pure prayer and, with his heart set ablaze by the divine fire, he received God's illumination and thus "took hold of the problem".

Here we see the way and the method of orthodox theology. In confronting such problems, the saints do not sharpen their reasoning and conjecture, they do not resort to philological and philosophical analyses, they do not simply study the writings of others, but they surrender themselves to pure prayer and receive the grace and illumination of God.

To be sure, sometimes in order to support their revelation, they also use texts of earlier saints, because these are being used by others in the discussion. Since people tend to reject experience or at least do not accept it absolutely, texts of other saints acknowledged by all are also used in order to confirm the experience of revelation. So patristic texts are cited on the one hand for others need this, and on the other hand to confirm the common experience. The problem lies not so much in citing patristic texts, but in their interpretive analysis. And this interpretation is not independent of the similarity of experiences.

When St. Symeon received enlightenment from God, he formulated his experience in simple words and humble phrases. Then, after refining the words, he put the answer together into a poem and verses and thus "loosed and dispelled the erudite man's tight knots through the power of word and spirit and through compactness of conceptions".

This method is very characteristic, because it shows how the Fathers theologise. In fact the Fathers of the Church do act in this way. They are not content only to concentrate on passages from Holy Scripture and other, earlier Fathers. This was mainly how the heretics worked. The Fathers, as we shall see also in analyses of St. Symeon later on, devoted themselves wholly to prayer, received illumination and enlightenment from God, formulated the revelation in simple propositions, and then, by the power of the word and of the gifts of grace they developed this Revelation more analytically. Thus their words emanated from experience and revelation.

When Stephen of Nikomedia read the words of St. Symeon he discerned the depth of their conceptions, the clarity and simplicity of the words, and he further discerned the man's character, "the yielding quality of the prayer in

tenderness", and since he knew that it came from an ignorant man who had not tasted "the knowledge from outside", he was astonished, and indeed he even lost his voice.

But instead of being humbled, of rejoicing and marveling at the wisdom of the Spirit, he did the opposite. He became angry with St. Symeon and sought to find something in his personal life for which to blame him. Finally however, because he had such a jealous disposition, he aroused the churchmen against St. Symeon for honouring his spiritual father Symeon the Pious as a saint although he had not been canonised by the Church. Then he began a persecution against St. Symeon⁷.

The text which St. Symeon gave to Stephen of Nikomedia has been preserved and is very characteristic. In poetic words it gives an answer about the relationship of the Son to the Father, it offers us the experiential theology concerning the Persons of the Holy Trinity and many other truths. Its words are not easy to analyse nor is it easy to present all the truths contained in this poem. But in what follows we shall set out the central points, mainly those which have a bearing on the subject that concerns us here.

Since I am afraid that I will betray the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian, for any analysis can end in a real betrayal of the patristic words, I shall quote whole passages from his poem. I have the impression that St. Symeon's words do not hold particular difficulties. And those who cannot understand the passages of the simple puristic language which he uses will be able to understand their deeper sense, because I shall try to present the concrete truth which is concealed in the passage quoted, before or after the quotation.

7. See Nicetas Stethatos: *Life of St. Symeon*.

I shall focus, then, on what is said in four main places, which in my opinion present the thought of St. Symeon the New Theologian in this text but also have a bearing on the subject which concerns us.

The poem which we shall study has the following heading: "Letter to a monk who asked: how do you separate the Son from the Father, by a rational or real distinction? In it you will find a wealth of theology overthrowing his blasphemy"⁸.

The first thing which we find in St. Symeon is that the knowledge of the Holy Trinity, as well as of all the theological topics, is a matter of revelation, experience and illumination by God.

In the beginning of the poem he refers to God, who manifested the light of his glory and illuminated the darkened soul which had lost its natural beauty.

"You have shone forth. You have manifested the inaccessible light of Your essence as the light of glory, O Saviour, You have enlightened a darkened soul, or rather a soul made dark by its sin, for it had lost its natural beauty, and you brought it back as from hell, where it was lying, and granted it to see the light of the divine day and to be illuminated by the rays of the sun and to become light, O great wonder!"⁹

Then St. Symeon says that all men who do not despise human desire for glory do not believe that God sends his light to men. In any case he who is granted the vision of

8. SC 174, p. 130

9. Ibid. p. 130-132

God is deified, becomes like God by grace, and becomes an angel, although he is bound by his body.

“He who has received the grace to see You unceasingly has truly received the angelic rank, even if he is tied to the flesh by nature”¹⁰.

With this introduction St. Symeon is pointing out that the topics of the dogma, especially the trinitarian question, that of the relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, is a matter of revelation and experience and not of conjectures. God sends grace, and the man illuminated by this uncreated glory of God sees God and becomes a theologian. And then theology is a true story for him, because he writes and speaks by what the Holy Spirit has given.

The second thing which we see in St. Symeon's poem is the fact that, although illumination is God's gift to man, nevertheless man, by his life and his ways, prepares the ground for the illumination. That is to say, the vision of God is God's energy and man's synergy. God operates and man co-operates.

St. Symeon is theologising in an orthodox way that the Holy Spirit is not sent to the worldly wise, to those who have gained distinction for human glory and great mental gifts, but to the lowly of heart. He writes:

“...all the holy Scriptures use these terms and many others about the divine operations, terms used by the Spirit Who proceeded from the Father in a way that cannot be expressed, Who has been sent by the Son to men; not to the unbe-

10. Ibid. p. 132

lieving, not to the patrons of glory, nor to actors, nor to scholars, nor to those who have studied the pagan writings nor to those who do not know our Scriptures, nor to those who have played a role on the world's stage, nor to those who utter abundant, mannered speech, nor to those who have made a great name, nor to those who have succeeded in being friends with famous people, but to those who are poor in spirit also in their life, to those who are pure in heart and body, to those whose words are unadorned, whose life is more unadorned and whose thoughts are simpler still..."¹¹.

Orthodox theology is a fruit of revelation, it is experience of the Holy Spirit. And of course it is not possible for those who rely on human knowledge, on human gifts, to receive the Holy Spirit, but it is possible for those who purify their souls and bodies and live in harmony with God's commandments. Therefore in another place St. Symeon also describes the practical conditions for reaching the point of receiving the Holy Spirit and theologising.

"Seek the Spirit! leave the world! Give no sleep to your eyes at all, nor care for the present life! Weep, bemoan the time you have lost! Perhaps God will console you and give to you, as He has already given to you when He let you see the world, and the sun and the light of day. Yes, He will likewise deign to enlighten you now, to disclose the noetic universe to you, to illumine you

11. Ibid. p. 134-136; Translated in: Archbishop Basil Krivocheine: In the light of Christ. SVS 1986, p. 48

with the triple sun, and if you see it, then you will know what I am saying; then you will learn the grace of the Spirit, that even absent it is present with power, and when present it is not seen because of its divine nature, but also exists everywhere and nowhere"¹².

This passage, which is wonderfully in harmony with the God-seeing tradition of the Church, shows us that in order to attain the vision of God, one must repent completely, that is to say, proceed from the unnatural to the natural and supranatural. Repentance is expressed through mourning, grieving. God, seeing this state, sends His grace, and then one is illuminated by the Trisolar light of God. Here St. Symeon is clearly referring to the experience of God in which the one who sees Him sees three lights. Indeed, as St. Symeon is teaching here, the one who sees God during this vision understands well the distinction between nature and energy, and that it is not possible to participate in God in His nature, but by grace and energy He can be shared and known. This distinction is not a matter of scientific reasoning and refined logic, but of revelation.

The t h i r d point on which we must comment, and which refers to the basic question put by Stephen of Nikomedia and shows the triadology of the vision of God, is connected with the preceding. We shall see here that theology really is an expression and fruit of theophany and not of logical and verbal thoughts and phrases.

St. Symeon is clearly acknowledging that to know the Threefold God is a revelation, a manifestation of God Him-

12. Ibid. p. 140-142

self. St. Symeon himself had many such experiences and revealing illuminations. He writes:

"I see the Son, and I see the Father, the Father is seen as just like the Son, except that the one begets and the other is eternally begotten. - What is there that exists without the Father? What is there? Express it to all men. -"¹³.

The saints, as St. Symeon says in another place, during the vision see three lights, which have unity together, but differ in hypostatic characteristics. The vision of the Father means that in the Son the Father too is seen, but the difference between unbegottenness and begottenness can be distinguished. It is a revealing knowledge, as he says in another place.

"Because they have the Spirit as their teacher, they do not need learning from men, but illumined by the light of the Spirit they look at the Son, they see the Father and worship the Trinity of the Persons, the one God, inexpressibly united in nature. From the Father they receive the revelation that the Son is begotten without division, in a way which He only knows, for I am not able to say it; for if I could, in any case the words would absolutely have the power to turn everything upside down. For if the creature understood the creator and who he is, he would understand and be able to express it in word and writing, the creation would be greater than the creator"¹⁴.

13. Ibid. p. 148

14. Ibid. p. 138-140

Here it is clearly said that during a vision of God the one who sees God sees that apart from the oneness in nature there is a distinction of Persons. The one who sees God is initiated into the fact that the Son is begotten of the Father without division. The person does not have to study the theology of men, but he experiences it during his vision of God. But, apart from this existential knowledge of the Holy Trinity, St. Symeon declares that the one who sees God does not know how the Son is begotten of the Father, which pertains exclusively to the Father. The one who sees God cannot express it, cannot formulate it fully. This means that the experience transcends logical formulation and the mystery of revelation is not absolutely connected with the dogma. If it were possible to formulate what is beyond words, there would be no distinction between creatures and the uncreated.

St. Symeon, having this theology of revelation, is able to formulate it as far as it is possible to human nature. The vision of God comes through the Holy Spirit, and through the Holy Spirit one is initiated into the knowledge of the Holy Trinity. On this topic he is very characteristic at one point, speaking of the Holy Spirit.

"He who possesses it truly possesses the three, but without confusion, if also without division; For the Father exists, and how can He be the Son? For He is essentially unbegotten. The Son exists, and how will He become Spirit? The Spirit is Spirit - and how will it appear as Father? The Father is Father, because He begets unceasingly. And how is this eternal begetting produced? In that it does not at all separate from the Father and comes forth whole in an inexplicable man-

ner and remains continually in the bosom of the Father and always comes forth in an inexpressible manner. The Son is seen in the Father constantly, He is begotten, but remains one with Him; and in the Son too one contemplates the Father, without distance nor division nor separation. The Son is Son because He is unceasingly begotten and was begotten before all ages. He comes forth without being cut from His root. But He is at the same time apart without being separate and is entirely one with the Father who is Living, and He Himself is life and gives life to all. What the Father has, so has the Son; what the Son has, so has the Father"¹⁵.

During his vision of God St. Symeon saw in the Holy Spirit three lights, but he could distinguish their particular hypostatic qualities as well. He outlines the theological truth that the Son "is eternally begotten" with the phrase that the Second Person comes forth from the First inexplicably, without being separated from Him. The Father is seen in the Son, but continuously and inseparably. This passage expresses exactly what orthodox theology is.

Having this astonishing experience he is able to answer the question put by Stephen of Nikomedia, whether the Son is separated from the Father, "in concept or reality". For if the former were the case, He would not be distinct from the Father, and if the second were the case, He would be a creature and not God. If we can maintain that the Son is separate from the Father, it means that it happens according to hypostasis and person, and not according to nature. With reference to the Father he says:

15. Ibid. p. 146-148

“Who are pre-eternal, subsisting by nature, before all eternity, with the God who shares your eternity, your Son, the Word, Who was begotten of You and Who is not separated from You, at least in nature, rather by his hypostasis, in other words by person, for to speak of a ‘real distinction’ is the ‘reason’ of the impious and godless, who are wholly blinded”¹⁶.

The Father is pre-eternal God and the Son is co-eternal with the Father. They share the same nature, but apart from the unity of nature there is a distinction of Persons, since the Father begets the Son and the Son is begotten of the Father. All these things appear in the experience of revelation, but in what follows they are formulated in terms of nature, person, hypostasis in order to have concrete answers to give to the heretical teachings. This means that dogmatic theology is in reality a “polemic” theology, it is an attempt by the Fathers to answer the teachings of the heretics. Real theology is experience, revelation.

The question “in concept or reality” leads to complete perplexity, because with such views one ends in erroneous conclusions and heretical teachings. St. Symeon writes:

“for either they separate the Word by concept, or by reality they go maliciously wrong, falling into heresies from both sides; for to separate Him ‘in reality’ is to cut the Word in two, and to separate Him by concept is to create confusion to the point of making no distinction at all”¹⁷.

16. Ibid. p. 132

17. Ibid. p. 154

Therefore the only way of not being led into heresy is experience and revelation. It is only then that one has a firm foundation and can also have a precise formulation. Otherwise, in trying to formulate the dogma of the Holy Trinity, one will end in heresies. Therefore the experience of revelation is necessary.

In order to show that the question creates confusion and cannot be answered by alternative choice, St. Symeon also makes use of two examples. One is anthropological and the other theological.

The anthropological example is the relationship between nous and word in man. The indivisibility of the word cannot be divided either in concept or in reality. When one is inside the house and one's nous is going the rounds outside, it does not mean that he remains without a nous inside the house. It is both outside and inside. He writes:

"For the indivisibility of the word is divided neither in reality nor by concept; for when one is enclosed within the house while one's nous is going the rounds outside, one is not left in the house without his nous, but it is really both with him and outside. What will you call this kind of separation? Will you call it a thing or will you call it a concept? If a concept, how can it be wholly outside, but if it is in reality, how is it inside the house? Yet what sort of example is this for the Word which surpasses nous and mind?"¹⁸.

And in another place St. Symeon, with this example in view, says that the Son comes forth from the Father, just as words come from the nous, they are separated from it just

18. Ibid. p. 148

as the voice is separated from the words and is embodied as the written word. That is to say that although nous, words, voice, and written word exist, so also the unity between them exists¹⁹.

However, in using this anthropological example, he also perceives the weakness of those people who make use of such examples in order to understand the dogma of the Holy Trinity. He is very characteristic when he says:

"From the high I have descended to the low and have come back to myself full of sorrow and I have wept over the race of men for they seek examples, thoughts and strange actions, and they insert expressions taken from human matters, believing that they are portraying the divine nature - a nature which no angels or men have had power either to perceive or to express"²⁰.

No one can understand God through human created examples. And this is because there is a chaotic difference between created and uncreated, because there is no sameness between them. The uncreated has no beginning or end, it does not decay. The created has a concrete beginning, it is possessed by decay and death and has no end, because God so willed. We are completely ignorant of the nature of God, but we know God from His names, which He revealed to men and which give indications concerning His nature, that is to say, His essential energy.

The passage from St. Symeon the New Theologian which I just quoted also reinforces what I mentioned in the preceding section, that while it is impossible for an

19. Ibid. p. 148

20. Ibid. p. 148-150

anthropological example to express the Threefold God, it is much more impossible for the Threefold God to be explained within anthropology. This is why those who maintain that man is an image of the Holy Trinity are in error. We can offer the threefold energy of our soul and man's threefold occupation to God, as St. Gregory Palamas explains, but we cannot say that man is in the form of the Holy Trinity. St. Symeon falls into distress, into lamentation, because the race of men inserts alien examples and human words in order to portray the divine nature.

The theological example which demonstrates the impossibility of interpreting the relationships of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is the incarnation of the Word. The Son was made man without being separated from the Father, He was at the same time in the womb of the Theotokos, in the bosom of the Father and uncontainable in the universe. That is to say, the Son, in spite of having assumed human nature and become man, still remained inseparably with the Father and uncontainable in all. And saying this, St. Symeon asks:

"in concept or really? Tell me. At least now you will remain silent; for even if you wished to speak, your nous would not give you a word and your talkative tongue would be reduced to silence"²¹.

The fact is that the human tongue cannot render such theological topics. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is beheld, in so far as it is possible to human nature, and then it is formulated with great care.

21. Ibid. p. 166

So now, in answer to the question whether the Son is separated from the Father by concept or in reality, St. Symeon says that neither is the case, but they have the same nature and different Persons and hypostases. The Father begets the Son and the Son is begotten by the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son. We know this from revelation, but we cannot know what is unbegottenness, what is begetting and what is proceeding. The philosophical mind cannot grasp it. This does not mean that we are being led into agnosticism, because it can be seen in experience. In this sense we can speak of demonstrative theology. It is not a matter of revelation in logical thoughts and propositions, but of the revelation of the Spirit.

The fourth point which I think is amazing is the suggestion which St. Symeon makes to Stephen of Nikomedia not to interest himself in such serious questions, which are a fruit of the vision of God, but to concern himself with other things in which he has competence as a Pastor. I am not going to make a full analysis of these words of his, nor to quote this wonderful and God-inspired advice, but to underline the main thoughts.

St. Symeon suggests to Stephen that he give up being a busybody and lay aside the blasphemy of words. He urges him to tell what the Christians should do in order to gain their salvation or preferably to tell how he himself was saved, so as to teach the people not by words but by works. He urges him to keep Christ's commandments because in that way, through action, he will attain the vision of God. Otherwise it is as if he wanted to drink wine before the harvest. He should teach about the judgement of God and the things which will happen at that day and hour. He should philosophise about death, which is useful for everybody.

He should speak about the creation, heaven, earth, the stars, the animals, and see the divine wisdom. He should concentrate his nous within himself and see all the passions that are there, and take thought for his cure²².

St. Symeon's words are also indicative because they suggest to him his work as a teacher. He is clearly making a distinction here between teaching and the vision of God. The teacher speaks of man's cure and of the Second Coming of Christ, while he who sees God is the one suited to speak of theological subjects, because he has the experience of revelation. At one point he says to Stephen of Nikomedia: "you have an infinite amount to say about these things"²³. And a little further on he writes mockingly, but also realistically:

"And while you are explaining with everyone, you will have enough to say about such things till you die, and these things will be useful to you after death"²⁴.

The teacher can busy himself with such truths until the end of his life, and so preach to the people. There are so many things which he can say, that his whole life is not enough. And indeed it will be useful to both himself and the others. Thus the philosopher and the educated man should not busy themselves with theological topics, and above all, should not make fun of those who have experience.

The above analysis has shown that the theology of the Holy Trinity is experiential, revealed, and given to the pure

22. Ibid. p. 154f

23. Ibid. p. 158

24. Ibid. p. 158-160

in heart who are on a suitable level to receive this revelation. Likewise it shows that the holy Fathers were not philosophers, but men who saw God. If the heretics had not appeared, who used different terms, these terms might not have existed, but there was to be a whole theology of the Threefold God. In the final analysis, those who see God are the spiritual leaders of the people of God. All other people and those who have intellectual tendencies should follow those who see God.

The illiterate in the world's eyes, like St. Symeon the New Theologian in this case, are the real wise men according to God, while the literate and well educated who do not have the revelation are stupid. The saints, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, do not theologise in an Aristotelian manner, but in the manner of fishermen.

5. The formation of the terms essence, hypostasis, person

In the course of the life of the Church the theology of the revelation of the Holy Trinity has been formulated in words in order, on the one hand, to preserve this revealed truth, and on the other hand to combat heretical teaching. This is precisely the task of the holy Fathers of the Church.

There is a long history with regard to the formulation of the terms for the Triune God. We shall not undertake a detailed analysis of this subject but will set out the most basic points, showing how the terms have been differentiated through the ages.

The New Testament speaks of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Christ spoke in this way. It says 'Father', because He is the source of the being of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It says 'Son', because He was begotten before all

ages from the Father, and the it says 'Holy Spirit', because He proceeded from the Father, not by generation, but by procession. Christ calls Himself Son of God, and calls the third Person of the Holy Trinity, Holy Spirit.

Likewise in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, the Son is characterised as Word, because He manifests the purpose and will of the Heavenly Father. It is known that John the Evangelist had known the term 'logos' (word) both in the Jewish Synagogue and in the Hellenistic environment, but he uses it in a different sense, meaning the Son of God.

In the Old Testament, among the many names of God there are two basic ones: Elohim and Yahweh. The first means the hidden God, while the second means the God revealed to the Prophets. Yahweh is the Son of God, the Word of the Father, because all the theophanies in the Old Testament are manifestations and revelations of the Word without flesh. And so these two names were used by the early Christians as well.

The Gnostics of the second century were constantly concerned with the creation of the world and with the evil that exists in it. Under the influence of philosophy, they attributed the evil in the world to an inferior God who created it. So they were making a distinction between the good God and the evil God. In order to do away with this view, various Monarchians employed the word 'person' for God in the sense of the mask. Thus Sabellios formulated the view that God is one, but he used three different person-masks. In the Old Testament He was manifested as Father, in the New Testament as Son, and in the life of the Church as Holy Spirit. In order to do away with the view of a higher and a lower god, they arrived at another heretical teaching.

The holy Fathers found themselves in this atmosphere, and in order to preserve the truth of revelation about the Holy Spirit, but also in order to answer the heretics who were using terms from philosophy, they conveyed the revelation in the same terms, but gave them a different content. And just here we see the two "schools" in patristic terminology. The first is the Alexandrian school, which identified 'ousia', substance, with hypostasis-person and set up the Creed in the First Ecumenical Council on the basis of this terminology. And the second is the Cappadocian school, which distinguished hypostasis from 'ousia', essence, and defined the statements of the Second Ecumenical Council.

In the writings of Athanasios the Great, 'ousia' was identified with hypostasis. Moreover he himself contributed to the formulation of the faith in the First Ecumenical Council, where the Creed reads: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten of the Father, which means 'from the ousia' of the Father". And towards the end there is condemnation of those who have erroneous ideas, such as that the Son "is alleged to be of another hypostasis or 'ousia'"²⁵. Here it seems that the 'ousia' was identified with hypostasis, obviously because the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father had to be emphasised.

'Ousia' came to be identified with hypostasis mainly through Athanasios the Great, whose purpose was to emphasise the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. Consequently it is used with a purely orthodox meaning, to combat the heretical teaching that the Son is a creature and does not have the same substance as the Father.

25. John Karmiris: *The dogmatic and symbolic records of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, vol. 1. Athens, 1952, p. 60

Athanasios the Great supported this decision of the First Ecumenical Council, formulating the view that 'hypostasis' and 'ousia' mean the same thing, since both mean 'existence': "for hypostasis and ousia are existence". The hypostasis is ousia and its meaning is being, which is interpreted as existence. He puts it characteristically: "The hypostasis is 'ousia' and it has no other meaning than this being, which Jeremiah calls existence, saying: "and they did not hear the voice of existence"²⁶. Indeed Athanasios the Great reproaches the heretics who ventured to write "that it ought not to be said that the Son has essence or hypostasis"²⁷.

It is clear that in the teaching of Athanasios the Great the hypostasis is identical with ousia. This comes about in his attempt to confirm the revealed truth that the Son has the same essence as the Father and is true God. Moreover, the term hypostasis is derived from the words for 'stand' and 'under' and means existence, the deepest being of being, and the term 'ousia', which comes from the participle being of the verb 'to be', again indicates existence.

However, after the first Ecumenical Council the heretics used the terms 'ousia' and hypostasis differently, because they used hypostasis-person in the sense of the mask and ended by emphasising that the Son and the Father have the same hypostasis. While in the time of Athanasios the Great, the identification of 'ousia' and hypostasis supported the teaching of the divinity of Christ as consubstantial with the Father, later the identification of 'ousia' with hypostasis ended in the existence of one God, who presents Him-

26. Athanasios the Great. *To the Bishops of Africa*, 4. NPNF vol. 4, p. 490

27. *Ibid.*

self with different masks. This is why it was necessary to separate the term 'ousia' from the term 'hypostasis-person'.

This work was done by the Cappadocian Fathers, such as Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa. They separated 'ousia' from 'hypostasis' and in this way changed the terminology of the Creed. Therefore in the final text of the Creed the sentences in which it appeared that the essence was identified with the person were eliminated and the difference between these concepts was formulated.

In the epistle of the Council of 382 the holy Fathers defined clearly : "To believe in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that is to say in the divinity and power and single essence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and their equal honour and rank and co-eternal sovereignty, in three most perfect hypostases, three perfect Persons"²⁸.

This text contains the final teaching of the Church about the Persons of the Holy Trinity. It says that they have one 'ousia', that is to say, they are consubstantial. Likewise it makes the three perfect hypostases identical with the three perfect Persons. This was done finally in order to avoid the heretical teachings of Sabellios, who confused the hypostases and destroyed their distinctions, and to avoid the blasphemous ideas of the Eunomians, Arians and those who denied the divinity of the Spirit and broke up the substance or nature or divinity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity by adding to the Holy Trinity another nature, created and different in substance²⁹.

28. John Karmiris, *Ibid.* p. 135

29. *Ibid.* p. 135

Therefore the change of terminology between the First and Second Ecumenical Councils did not happen because of any change in the teaching of the Church about the Holy Trinity, but because the same revealed experience had to be protected from various heretical teachings. In the First Ecumenical Council the essence is identified with the hypostasis in order to emphasise the divinity of the Logos against Arius, and in the Second Ecumenical Council the essence is separated from the hypostasis in order to emphasise once again the divinity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity against Sabellios and other heretics. So we have a change of terminology and no change of theology.

In what follows I would like to add the teaching of St. Basil the Great about the difference between 'ousia' and hypostasis. To be sure, we have met this difference also in other Cappadocian Fathers, for instance in St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa, but I would like to speak only of St. Basil the Great, in whom this orthodox teaching is summarised.

Characteristically St. Basil the Great emphasises that hypostasis and essence are not the same thing. The difference between the essence and the hypostasis is the same as that between the general and the individual. Thus the term 'ousia' characterises and expresses what is common, such as goodness and divinity, while the hypostasis characterises the particularity of fatherhood, sonship and sanctifying power³⁰.

Therefore "ousia and hypostasis are distinct in that the general is distinct from the particular". So in the Holy Trinity we confess one substance for the Godhead, but we confess a person that is particular". What is general is the

30. Basil the Great: Letter 125, LCL vol. 2, p. 262

Godhead, while fatherhood, sonship and the procession of the Holy Spirit are particular. In this way "throughout the whole, both unity is preserved in the confession of the one Godhead, and that which is peculiar to the Persons is confessed in the distinction made in the characteristics attributed to each"³¹.

It is characteristic of St. Basil when he says that by this usage of terms the unity is preserved and the distinction of the Persons is confessed. Actually, the terminology is for the preservation of the experience of revelation. The deified experience seeing the uncreated energy which proceeds from the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but they do not see the essence as well. Thus they know from experience that in spite of the unity of nature and substance, in spite of the coessentiality, there are different Persons. This experience is formulated in terms of 'ousia' and hypostasis-person.

We find a broad analysis of these topics in all the subsequent periods. I would like to mention the teaching of Presbyter Theodoros of Raith, who in his "On preparation" made excellent observations, developing naturally the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers.

First he makes an etymological and theological analysis of the terms 'ousia' and 'nature' and 'hypostasis' and 'person'. He says that the name 'essence' (ousia) derives from the verb 'to be' and denotes that which is, that which exists. The term 'ousia' is used chiefly to name that which exists independently and does not have being for and in another. Then again the word 'nature' is derived from "to have been produced", and means "to exist". Therefore the terms essence and nature mean the same thing, because

31. Letter to Amphilochios. LCL vol. 3, p. 401f

the first comes from being and the second from having been produced, and both mean existence. The hypostasis is a thing "subsisting and essential, in which the sum total of events subsists as by one underlying thing and energy". The word 'hypostasis' comes "from subsisting and wholly existing and supporting". 'Person' also characterises that which makes its presence wholly manifest by its own actions and characteristic features, and at the same time is distinguished by its coessentiality³².

While etymologically the terms essence, nature, and hypostasis mean almost the same things, theologically they have differences as the holy Fathers define them. According to Theodore of Raith, while essence and hypostasis mean the same thing, there is a clear difference, because essence means only that which is, while the hypostasis not only means that which is, but also "how and what sort of being it happens to have. Therefore the essence manifests what is common, while hypostasis manifests the individual. The hypostasis is distinguished from essence in the sum total of happenings³³.

St. John of Damaskos, justifying theologically the use of the terms 'essence' and 'hypostasis', says that by the three hypostases we acknowledge "the uncompounded and without confusion", by the consubstantiality of hypostases we recognise the indivisibility and existence of one God, that is to say we recognise the identity of will, energy, power, authority and movement³⁴.

It is not necessary to go on to the other Fathers of the Church. Through these basic teachings it can be seen that

32. Theodore, Presbyter of Raith, Preparation... see Athanasiou Nika: Theodore of Raith. Athens 1981, p. 202-214

33. Ibid. p. 210-211

34. John of Damaskos: The Orthodox Faith, Bk. 1, ch. 8 FC. p. 185

when the Church used different terms to formulate the dogma of the Holy Trinity, it was not done to develop the philosophy, nor simply to understand the dogma theoretically and logically, but to formulate the Revelation and to deter the error of the heretics. The holy Fathers were not philosophers, but theologians, people who see God. The experience that they had was superior to logical elaboration.

We can take one example in order to make this more understandable. A scientific investigator in his laboratory can discover the medicine for the cure of an illness. But after this he uses a standard term to give notice of the medicine. But if later through other research and further special conversations the terminology of the medicine changes, it does not also necessitate a change in the constituents of the medicine.

We can confirm that the same thing holds with regard to the dogmas of the Church. The holy Fathers, as we are repeatedly saying in this text, saw the glory of God, attained experience and existential knowledge of the Holy Trinity and then formulated this experience in words, in order to insure it against distortion by the heretics.

6. The weakness of theological terms

The holy Fathers know clearly that experience transcends logic and rational formulation. This means that the terms can never fully express the truth. Therefore they are limited to signifying and suggesting it. The Apostle Paul says that he heard "inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12,4). The inexpressible and uncreated words are the Revelation, which is formulated in created words and meanings.

Although the holy Fathers formulate their experience

in words, they clearly deny that they understand it logically. This is a very significant point, and we must develop it further.

First we must speak of the teaching of Basil the Great that we know God from His energies but we do not know His essence. This distinction was made by St. Basil in opposition to the Anomians, who maintained that the essence of the Son is dissimilar and therefore lower than the essence of the Father. Aetios and then his pupil Eunomios, using Aristotle's logic and method, identified the essence of the Father with His unbegottenness. As unbegotten, the essence is also indivisible, which means that it cannot be shared with other beings through generation. On these grounds they downgraded Christ and at the same time proclaimed that man knows the essence of God, since man knows what God also knows. The Anomians were extreme Arians³⁵.

St. Basil confronts this great theological problem and concretely answers the question put by the Anomians: "Do you worship what you know or what you do not know?" This question was designed to create confusion in the Orthodox, because if they answered that they worship what they know, then they would be called on to define what the essence is, while if they answered that they did not know the essence, then they would be accused of worshipping something that they did not know, whereupon they would be regarded as agnostics.

In answer to this question Basil the Great makes the clear distinction between essence and energies in God. I do not propose to develop this very important theme, which

35. Pan. Christou: *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics*, vol. 2, p. 851. (Gk)

St. Gregory Palamas was later to analyse extensively, but I will emphasise one interesting point which St. Basil stresses. He says that there is a difference between "the fact that God is" and "what He is". We know that God exists, but we do not know what is the essence of God, because it is beyond our minds. "But I do know that He exists, but what His substance is I consider beyond understanding"³⁶.

This of course does not interfere with man's salvation, for man is saved by faith. And it is enough for faith that man realises that God exists, and He rewards those who seek Him, and not what is His essence, which would be curiosity and would have no bearing on salvation. And indeed St. Basil the Great maintains that to worship is not to comprehend what is the essence of the object of worship, but to comprehend that its essence exists³⁷.

No object, nothing exists which does not have energy. Every energy also has its essence, and every essence also has its energy. We recognise that essence exists through its energy. And if energy is created, essence too is created, if energy is uncreated, essence too is uncreated. Therefore we recognise that the uncreated essence exists from its uncreated energies, but we do not recognise what the essence is. Therefore "from the activities is the knowledge, and from the knowledge is the worship"³⁸.

What is true of God is true by analogy of men. In other words, we both know and do not know other men. We know their characters and qualities, but we do not know their essence, their substance. The same is true of ourselves. St. Basil the Great says: "For I know myself, who I am, but I

36. Basil the Great: Letter 234, to Amphilochios. LCL vol. 3, p. 375

37. Ibid.

38. Basil the Great. Letter 234, to Amphilochios, LCL Vol. 3, p. 377

do not know myself insofar as I am ignorant of my substance"³⁹.

With regard to God, then, we know God "that He is" as well as "how He is". "How he is" refers to the way of being of each Person of the Holy Trinity. Thus how the Son was begotten of the Father is entirely unknown, just as it is unknown how the Holy Spirit proceeds and how the Father is unbegotten. We know that the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds, but we do not know the "how". The knowledge refers to the existence of God, because the deified man knows from experience and from participation in His energies that He exists, just as he also knows it indirectly through what is created, but he does not know at all what is the essence and the way of being of each Person. We confess that we know "what is knowable about God, just as we also know "what escapes our comprehension"⁴⁰. The worship of God is born of the knowledge of God, and the knowledge comes from participation in His energies"⁴¹.

And we find the same theology in the other Cappadocian Fathers. I would like particularly to mention here that St. Gregory the Theologian makes a thorough analysis of the fact that man cannot know "the how" of God, that is to say, His way of being. Not only man but also the angels do not know the "how" of the generation of the Son, and the "how" of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory uses various arguments to refute the logical formulations of the heretics of his time. He finally concludes: "The begetting of God must be honoured by silence. It is a great

39. Letter 235, to Amphilochios. LCL vol. 3, p. 380

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid. p. 377

thing for you to learn that He was begotten. But as to the manner of His generation, we will not admit that even angels can conceive it, much less you"⁴². And in another place he says that if man should attempt to understand logically the "how" of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, he would end in madness. St. Gregory writes: "You tell me what is the unbegottenness of the Father, and I will explain to you the physiology of the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, and we shall both be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God"⁴³.

St. John of Damaskos has the same perspective when he repeats the thought of Basil the Great that God is knowable in His being and His energies, but entirely unknowable and incomprehensible in His essence. He writes: "Thus it is clear that God exists, but what He is in essence and nature is unknown and beyond understanding"⁴⁴.

Thus the deified man who partakes of God's energies knows clearly "that God exists", but he does not know "what He is in essence" or "the manner of being" of the Persons, for these two surpass the limits of human thought. This distinction is significant, because in this way we can understand what is known about God and what is unknown, and the fact that God, while known, remains incomprehensible in His essence. And since the "manner of His being" has a bearing on the mode of being of the Persons, we can say that although we know that the Father is unbegotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds, we do not know how this came about. We know the hypostatic characteristics from

42. Gregory the Theologian: Third theological oration, 1-9. NPNF p. 301-304

43. Fifth theological oration: On the Holy Spirit, 8. NCNL p. 320

44. Orthodox Faith: Book 1, chapter 4. FC 37, p. 170

the revelation of Christ and the experience of the Revelation in terms of our personal life. But we do not know the manner of the "how".

If we do not look at theology from this basic position, we shall constantly create confusion, and we shall not be able to theologise in a sound and orthodox way.

Since this problem is important, the Fathers regard "apophatic theology" as important. Cataphatic theology derives from 'kata' and the verb 'to say' and means that I define something, whereas apophatic theology is derived from 'away' and 'say', indicating that we avoid defining. Thus, for God we use both terms of cataphatic theology and terms of apophatic theology. We say that God is love, peace, righteousness, goodness etc., because we know it from His essential and enhypostatic energies, but at the same time we say that God is invisible, incomprehensible as to His incomprehensible essence, but also in relation to the effort of human logic to understand Him.

This means that when the saints attain experience of God, in their vision of God and participation in Him, they see very well that God is light. John the Evangelist declares: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1,5). But when heretics emerged who maintained that they knew God through their occupation with logic, then the holy Fathers stressed that in the 'light' of human knowledge, God is darkness. In order to confront other heretics who said that they understood and saw the essence of God, the Fathers emphasised that God is a darkness beyond light.

We see this in all the names of God. The essence of God is spoken of, but when we confuse God's essence with created essence, with realities that we know, then it is characterised as supra-essential essence. St. John of Damaskos says that when we are going to declare what is the

essence of some person or thing, we have to say what it is, and not what it is not. However, in the case of God, it is impossible to say what He is in His essence. Therefore "it is better to discuss Him by abstraction from all things whatsoever". And this is because God is not like the things that are, not because He is not a being, "but because He transcends all beings and being itself". Thus, according to the apt observation and expression of St. John of Damaskos, "The Divinity, then, is limitless and incomprehensible, and this, His limitlessness and incomprehensibility, is all that can be understood about Him"⁴⁵.

The things that we say cataphatically about God clarify things about the nature of God and not His nature itself. That is to say the names of God express His essential energies. But also the things said cataphatically are not confirmed apophatically, because God is not like any of the created things. "There are, moreover, things that are stated affirmatively of God, but which have the force of extreme negation"⁴⁶.

St. Dionysios the Areopagite says that everything divine which is revealed to us is known only through participation in them. That is to say, man participates in the uncreated energies of God and in this way knows God. Although we know these things through participation, "their actual nature, what they are ultimately in their own source and ground, is beyond nous and beyond all being and knowledge". What is true of the uncreated energies, is also true of the mode of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. That is to say, through Christ's revelation we know that the Father is the originating source of the Godhead, and

45. *The Orthodox Faith*, Ibid. FC p. 171-172

46. Ibid. p. 172

that the Son and the Spirit are, "so to speak, divine offshoots, the flowering and transcendent lights of the divinity", but again "we can neither say nor understand how this could be so"⁴⁷. This means that man knows that the Persons of the Holy Trinity, which are consubstantial, exist, just as he also knows by Revelation that they differ in hypostatic qualities, but it is not possible to understand and explain the way in which they exist. He knows from Revelation that the Son is begotten of the Father, but he cannot rationally understand how.

St. Maximos the Confessor has this same view when he says that God is incomprehensible, because His existence defies all definition of time or manner, altogether excluding "when and how He is". God is also said to be essence, but if we associate this notion with human and created notions, God is not essence. St. Maximus says clearly that "God is not a being either in the general or in any specific sense of the word". In the same way He is not energy "in the general or any specific sense"⁴⁸.

This is also true of all the meanings. We know that God is one and three, that is, one essence and three Persons. But if one associates these meanings with human created meanings, then God is neither one nor three. Thus apophatic theology is the Golgotha of human logic, because it aims to lead man to personal participation in God, and not simply to the logical understanding of God.

All that we have said so far shows that although we know from Revelation and experience "that God is", we

47. Dionysios the Areopagite: *Divine Names*, ch. 2,7. Writings. CWS p. 63-64

48. Maximos the Confessor: *First century on theology*, 4, *Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 114-115

do not know "what He is" and "how He is". We speak about the fact that God is Person and that the Persons of the Holy Trinity interpenetrate one another, but we must not confuse this with created human realities, nor should we transfer the triadology to anthropology and sociology. I shall develop this subject in the next section as well, because I consider it very important. It is my opinion that it is an impiety and perhaps a heresy to mix the uncreated with the created without the necessary presuppositions.

But before I close this section we must make one distinction. Speaking of apophatic theology and the fact that God is incomprehensible and unknowable to man in His nature and His essence, we must not think that we are ending in agnosticism. The scholastics, interpreting the teaching of St. Dionysios the Areopagite by logical arguments, came to such conclusions. Barlaam expressed a similar view, and therefore St. Gregory Palamas confronted it at its foundation.

The dialogue between St. Gregory Palamas and Barlaam has sufficient interest at this point as well. St. Gregory, an Orthodox theologian, restrained the moderate agnosticism of Barlaam and underlined the truth of the Church about what is known and unknown about God.

Barlaam's appearing in the East was mainly associated with the dialogue between orthodox and Latins about the procession of the Holy Spirit. Barlaam, representing the orthodox side, placed the subject on sound foundations, following the theology of Photius, but it was clear that he had a different starting-point. Barlaam denied the possibility of formulating demonstrable judgements about theological topics and relied for the solution on the authenticity of Revelation. Starting from this notion he considered that there is nothing stable in the theological opinions, there

are inconsistencies and that is why there have had to be dialectical syllogisms in order to resolve the conflicts. He tried in this way to deal with the theological difference between the two Churches on the subject of the procession of the Holy Spirit in order for unity of the Churches to be achieved⁴⁹.

St. Gregory Palamas, after his orthodox presentation of the theology of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, insisted strongly on how this truth can be known. He emphasised particularly the value of illustrative syllogism, and not of dialectical judgements. The use of the dialectical method and the rejection of illustrative syllogisms creates many problems, because it leads to agnosticism. If we have no illustrations of the existence and illumination of God, then God remains unknown to man.

St. Gregory analyses that the pure in heart know through "the evidence of the holy illumination inborn in them that God exists and what light is, or rather what is the source of noetic and immaterial light". The deified, illuminated by the light of God have proofs and evidence that God exists and is manifested as light. This theophany comes about by the grace of God, which illuminates them. All who have not attained the vision of God, attain knowledge of these things through those who see God. Through these witnesses there is unerring proof that a God exists who foresees, is all-powerful, etc.

The saints have experience of this Revelation and know that God exists, and they also know His personal characteristics. However, they can also use demonstrative and not dialectical syllogisms to describe this Revelation. Therefore in a letter to Akindynos he analyses exhaustively the

49. Panayiotis Christou, in Gregory Palamas EPE vol. 1, p. 379

difference between illustrative and dialectical syllogisms, and also tells how we use illustrative syllogisms.

The illustrative syllogism speaks "about what is necessary and ever being and true being and always present as well". That is to say that these are firm principles which are related to revelation and truth. Therefore it does not conjecture, does not feel the need to receive the opposing views of the two sides in order to reconcile them, and in general it proceeds from what is true and right. Since the deified man has experience "that God exists", then, having this unshakeable truth of revelation, he formulates it in syllogisms. Orthodox theology moves in this atmosphere, and this is why we find many thoughts and syllogisms in the works of the holy Fathers, without their deviating from the truth of revelation.

By contrast, dialectical syllogism concerns itself "with the glorious and probable and what once was and now is, now is not, sometimes true, sometimes not". He who uses the dialectical syllogism, as the philosophers do, is using the dialogue to persuade his interlocutors, and indeed he is obliged to receive what his interlocutor gives him. The person using dialogue in this way starts from probabilities, which are not true, and sometimes even false.

On theological topics, especially about the dogma concerning the Holy Trinity, not dialectical syllogisms, but illustrative ones are suitable. There cannot be any proof about the essence or nature of God, but as to the other topics relating to the hypostases and energies, we can develop illustrative syllogisms.

St. Gregory Palamas writes: "...but to know illustratively and share divine science with others through words"⁵⁰.

50. Gregory Palamas, Works, EPE vol. 1 p. 426-430

St. Gregory's conclusion is that the Divine is beyond all nous and word and beyond the dialectic, because it is above imagination and knowledge, but also beyond the demonstrable. It is above any syllogistic method, since there is no contact and knowledge. But from the Fathers we have learned "to syllogise about the working of divine things". St. Gregory concludes: "But we approach the divine things in a divine way by the inspired power of the theologians; but they called them illustrative, as was shown above"⁵¹.

In thinking of theological themes, particularly the dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity, we should not use human wisdom, but seek the divine in a divine way. And of course the knowledge of the divine is presented illustrative syllogisms and not in dialectical ones, which are associated with probability and logical arguments as proffered by science. It is in these frames that Orthodox theology moves. In the first place, it is connected with Revelation, it is a revealing word into which the deified person, the one who partakes of theosis, is initiated. God reveals Himself and offers true knowledge. Man, in the course of experience, does not think at all, since all the energies of the body are transcended. After the vision of God he has certainty about having seen God, he has no doubt and can formulate this experience logically, that is to say, he can confront all the false opinions with certainty, using illustrative syllogisms. But it must be emphasised that the deified, in spite of the various terms, feel powerless to express things perfectly, because the human word is finite. The experience is without created words and thoughts, but it is formulated with created words and thoughts. So because of the weakness of the terms, and

51. Ibid. p. 482-484

also because of the confusion which the terms associated with created things create, the Fathers arrive at the use of apophatic terms and expressions as well.

In general we can say that we know very well from Revelation that God exists, that He has essence and energies, that He is Threefold, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the Father is the source of the other Persons, that the Son is begotten of the Father, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son. But we do not know what His essence is, and how the Son is begotten from the Father, and how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. This does not mean that we end in agnosticism, since we know the Persons of the Holy Trinity from their uncreated energies. Moreover it is known that God's energies are essential and hypostatic, since energies do not exist without essence, and they do not act apart from Persons. He who acts is the Person.

7. Correlation of triadology with anthropology and sociology

What has been said I think has demonstrated that the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is incomprehensible to man, is a different thing from the dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is experienced, as far as it is possible for finite human nature; that is to say, one participates in the uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity, but one cannot form apodictic syllogisms about the dogma of the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

All these things were essential for us in order to reach what we have emphasised from the start, that it is not possible for triadology to be absolutely correlated with an-

thropology and sociology. We cannot interpret the relationships between men according to the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Since the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is unknown, apart from the fact that we know the hypostatic characteristics of each Person, how then is it possible for this way of being of the Persons of the Trinitarian God to be considered as the type for our own interpersonal relations?

This subject requires greater analysis, because, as I emphasised at the start, there is great confusion and perhaps distortion of the orthodox triadology when it is associated with sociology, that is to say, when we wish to clarify the relationship between the persons in society on the basis of the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

I would like to focus attention and interest on three basic points, which will show us the impasse which such correlations reach.

The first is the term 'Person'. We have seen before that the Fathers assigned this term to God, with the aim of refuting the error of the heretics, but also of expressing the experience of Revelation. With certain conditions they also called man a person-hypostasis. However, it could not be regarded as the same thing, without the necessary analysis and adjustment.

In the first place it is known that God is uncreated, while man is created. There is no likeness between created and uncreated. Uncreated refers to what has no beginning and end, while created refers to what has a concrete beginning and has no end because God wishes it to have no end. The uncreated is unchanging, while the created is changing, it has change and decay. Furthermore, God is bodiless, while man has a body. If we consider the fact that in his life since his fall, man has been wearing the garments of skin, that is

to say, decay and mortality, and has been possessed by passions, then we understand the difference that exists between God and man. There can be no absolute correlation between the Person of God and the person of man.

St. John of Damaskos says in apt and precisely worded thought and phrase, that it is impossible to find in creation any image which exactly portrays the way of being of the Holy Trinity. The created is compounded, variable, changeable, circumscribed, has shape, and is corruptible. All the opposites apply to the uncreated. Moreover it is here that the difference between created and uncreated is to be found. The entire creation is inclined towards these factors and is still in bondage to decay. So how is it possible for the created to display "that suprasubstantial divine essence which is far removed from all these things?"⁵².

We know that the bridge between uncreated and created is one, the point which unites them is one, it is Christ, in the Person of whom the divine has been united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly with human nature, or to put it better, the divine nature assumed human nature in the hypostasis of the Logos. Therefore man, who is in the image of God, which is potentially a likeness, living in the Church and united with Christ, can become a person actually. Indeed man is by birth potentially a person, but he must actualise this hypostatic principle by the power of Christ. In communion with God he becomes a person.

Moreover we cannot conceive of the person if there is no communion. The person does not live alone; he has reference, relationship, communion. If there is a passionate relationship, we cannot speak of communion. Therefore

52. John of Damaskos: *Exact exposition of the orthodox faith*, Book 1, ch. 8. FC p. 183

we say that the hypostatic principle in man is activated by the ascetic and mystical life.

The second point is that of the mutual interpenetration ('perichoresis') of persons. As we said at first, some people use the theology of the mutual interpenetration of persons which applies to the Holy Trinity, in order to characterise the relations between the persons in society and in the Church as well. A great deal is being said today about interpersonal relations and interpenetration of beloved Persons, according to the way of being of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

To be sure, the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity refers to their hypostatic character and cannot demonstrate human relations. For how can unbegotten, begotten and proceeding, which are the ways of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, be transferred to the human facts? The term 'symbebikos', what has come together or happened, has many meanings. In human facts this refers to the manner of outward action, expression, and so forth, and not to the hypostatic characteristics as is said with reference to the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The point is that what applies to the relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity cannot be transferred to human affairs as well, that is to say, what happens between the Persons of the Holy Trinity cannot happen in human relations.

In the teaching of the holy Fathers we see that there is a distinction in the manner of union. The union in nature which exists in the Persons of the Holy Trinity is a different thing from the hypostatic union which exists in the Person of the Logos through the assumption of human nature by the divine nature. And again the union in energy which took place by His creating man in the image of God

and whenever man participates in the deifying energy of God. This means that man when united with Christ can never become God-man, even by grace, nor of course can he experience the union of essence which is proper to the Persons of the Holy Trinity⁵³.

Since man, receiving the grace of God, can never attain hypostatic union, it is never possible for created man to commune in nature with the uncreated God. Consequently he can never experience the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and the interpenetration of the Persons of the Holy Trinity cannot be regarded as a pattern for human interpersonal relations.

The Persons of the Holy Trinity have a common nature and personal characteristics. In spite of their particular ways of being, the persons live within one another, and thus the Logos cannot be understood apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit, nor the Spirit apart from the Father and the Logos. But if we see the way of being and of communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity as the pattern for human interpersonal human relations, then how can we understand the communion between people, given that there is a body as well? How is it possible for a communion of loved persons to exist according to the prototype of the Threefold God, when there are bodies, passions, etc.? How can they live in one another? I cannot understand this.

I think that St. John of Damaskos will help us greatly to see this difference. Since he makes the distinction that real seeing is one thing and taking a logical view is another, he says that in all creatures the distinction of the hypostases is meant in reality. Someone who is called Peter is independent of another who is called Paul. While they are ac-

53. John of Damaskos, FC 37, p. 104f

tually separate from each other, their oneness is meant with reference to logic and thought. The common nature of the two is also understood with reference to reason. For we know that each one is a logical and mortal being and is flesh instilled with reason and a noetic soul. They do not contain each other's hypostasis. "Nor are the hypostases in one another". There are many things which separate the hypostases, such as time and manner and power, shape and habit, profession and all the characteristic features, but most of all, the fact that they are not living in each other. "They live not in one another but apart". Thus human hypostases cannot live in one another, but there are many elements which unite them. Therefore the division between the hypostases is real and the unity of natures is intelligible and rational, that is to say it is seen in thought.

The opposite is true of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. "It is quite the contrary in the case of the holy, suprasubstantial, all-transcendent, and incomprehensible Trinity". In the Holy Trinity the community and unity are understood in a real way, by reason of the identity of substance, energy, will, opinion, authority, power and goodness. Therefore the essence, energy, and power of the three hypostases is one. But while the oneness of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is real, the division is a "conception", that is to say it is with reference to their way of being. This means that, in spite of the particular hypostatic characteristics, there is real unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity in nature and essence. In the Persons of the Holy Trinity there is no spatial distance, as there is in us, nor any difference of will, opinion, energy, power etc.⁵⁴.

The words of St. John of Damascus defy every attempt

54. *Orthodox Faith*, Book 1, ch. 8, p. 186-187

to correlate the interpenetration of the Persons of the Holy Trinity with the interpenetration of the human persons in community, even within the Church. There is a chaotic difference between them. What man can say that it is possible to live completely, psychosomatically, within the hypostasis of another? In any case St. John of Damaskos rules it out. Perhaps a deified person can live it in part, but even this cannot happen in just the same way as in the interpenetration of the divine hypostases.

The t h i r d point is related to what has just been said and refers to interpersonal relations. In order to emphasise how the relationships of people should function in community and in marriage, some people take as an example the way in which the Persons of the Holy Trinity are related. They link the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity with the figures love-freedom, and unity-freedom. That is to say, they maintain that in the Holy Trinity there is love and unity, which are expressed by their common nature and essence, and the freedom which is expressed by the hypostatic characteristics of each Person. Therefore, as they say, love can never do away with freedom, nor freedom do away with love, just as freedom must exist in unity and unity in freedom.

It must be acknowledged that at one time in the past when I was studying such views, they appealed to me because I could use them in speaking of the relations between people. And in reality it is quite appealing and interesting to speak about the fact that we cannot suppress the freedom of another in the name of love, because this is a form of dictatorship, just as also love and unity must not be suppressed in the name of each person's freedom, for this constitutes anarchy. It is also quite interesting to explain the relationship between unity and freedom with ref-

erence to the social systems, capitalism and Marxism. But I am convinced that we can make such correlations, but independently of what takes place in the Holy Trinity.

We said before that the relationship of the Persons of the Holy Trinity cannot be applied to human data, because the Triune God is uncreated, while man is created.

At all events, the philosophising and sociologising theologians who make such correlations without understanding it fall into many theological errors. I shall try to pinpoint two of these, the most characteristic, in what follows.

One is that love and freedom are not persons, but natural energies. Goodness, freedom, will, and so forth, are essential energies of the Triune God. The energies of God are enhypostatic, because they are expressed through the hypostases, but they are not hypostases-persons.

St. John of Damaskos says that by the three Persons we understand that God is uncompounded and without confusion, by the consubstantiality of the Persons and their existence in one another and by the indivisibility of the identity "of will, operation, virtue, power, and, so to speak, motion" we recognise the undividedness and the fact that God is one⁵⁵. The unity between the Persons in God is real for the co-eternalness, and sameness of essence, energy, and will, for the harmony of opinion and sameness of authority, power and goodness, "and the one impulse of motion". He is not speaking of likeness, but of identity. For "there is one essence, one goodness, one power, one will, one energy, one and the same, not three alike, but one and the same motion of the three hypostases"⁵⁶.

55. John of Damaskos: *On the Orthodox Faith*. FC. p. 185

56. *Ibid.*

It is clear that goodness and will are energies of the essence and express the sameness of the essence. The energy in the Triune God is common. This means that love, opinion, will, and movement do not belong to the persons, but to the essence.

With these facts, how can we think that love is linked with what is common, and freedom is linked with its own hypostatic characteristic? A greater problem is created when we identify freedom with the want of being, and in this way we relate it with the freedom of each man. We shall see this later on, but here we wish to emphasise that since the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is the Son and the Third is the Holy Spirit, it is not possible for us to think that they can move freely and independently of the Father. A sociological analysis sees it in such a way when it applies to the Triune God.

In the Triune God we distinguish essence and nature and hypostases or persons. This does not mean that the essence or nature can exist without the persons, or that the persons or hypostases can be considered independently of the essence or nature. Moreover, according to the teaching of our Fathers, the essence is seen through the particular hypostatic qualities.

The other error is to be found in the matter of the unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Some people maintain that the unity is due to the Father who is "original god-head", and others that the unity is due to the common essence. These two views end in different conclusions. The first view ends in overemphasis of the person, the second ends in overemphasis of the essence and creates an abstract theology.

I think that apart from the partial truths which are hidden within such isolated views, the truth is that the one-

ness of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is due both to the Father, Who begets the Son and sends out the Holy Spirit, and to their common essence. The first shows the cause of the existence of the other Persons and describes their hypostatic characteristics, and the second underlines the common energy. I cannot conceive that each Person acts freely, with the common essence which they have, for in that case we would end with God having a moral will rather than a natural one.

This too is an important topic, which shows that it is not possible for us to speak of interpersonal human relations which must move according to the prototype of the Holy Trinity with regard to freedom and love. For in human facts freedom is taken for a will of choice, whereas we cannot speak of a will of choice in the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but rather of a natural will which is common to the Holy Trinity because it is linked with nature.

In general, it is by no means possible for the manner of existence of the Persons of the Holy Trinity and the relationship between them to be made a prototype for the interpersonal relations of the people in the community and the family. It is never possible for ecclesiology, anthropology and sociology to have reference to the trinitarian relationship.

St. John of Damaskos, speaking of the way of being of the Son, says: "for no other generation is to be compared to the generation of the Son of God". And speaking of the procession of the Holy Spirit he says: "This other way of being is incomprehensible and unknown, just as is the generation of the Son"⁵⁷. The way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, that is to say the way in which the Per-

57. Ibid. p. 181

sons exist, is unknown and incomprehensible to the human mind. We know from Christ's revelation that the Son exists by begetting and the Holy Spirit by procession. But exactly what this is we do not know, because it concerns the innermost relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity and is entirely unknown.

Man's attempt to understand these things mentally is scholasticism. And the attempt to adapt the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity to human facts and interpersonal relations is a heresy.

To be sure, those who make such a correlation base themselves on Christ's words in His high-priestly prayer to the Father. "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are" (John 17,11). Here Christ asks His Father that His disciples may attain unity together, *i n t h e w a y* that they too (the Persons of the Holy Trinity) are united together. But this passage also does not favour correlations just such as are made by those people who exploit not only the dogma of the Holy Trinity but also the very mystery of the Holy Trinity. And this for two reasons.

The first because, as Fr. John Romanides teaches, and as is clear from the study of the whole highpriestly prayer of Christ, here Christ is referring to the unity of the disciples which they will acquire on the day of Pentecost, when they will attain the vision of God. It is about the unity among them when they attain deification.

The passage "that they may behold My glory which You have given Me" should be seen in correlation with the passage "that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17, 23-24). Therefore it is a question of the disciples' oneness in glorification, in the vision of God and deification, which took place on the day of Pentecost. This prayer was ful-

filled on the day of Pentecost and is fulfilled when each deified person attains deification and the vision of God⁵⁸.

The other basic reason for which Christ's words have absolutely no application to human data is in the interpretation given by St. Cyril of Alexandria to Christ's high-priestly prayer. I am not setting out to analyse the views of St. Cyril, but only to give his interpretation that the "as" does not mean complete identity but is used "as an image and type", and from the point of view "of imitating the characters". The bond and the love between us cannot apply in an identical way, as it does in the relationships of the Son with the Father, because there they are "identical in essence".

St. Cyril says that the relationship of the Son to the Father "is meant natural and true, also with regard to its way of being". That is to say, it is true and natural because it is a unity of essence and according to its way of being. In contrast, the relationship and unity of men "pretends to take the form of true unity". We see the true relationship of community and unity in the Persons of the Holy Trinity, while, perfect as the relations between human beings may be, they are imitations of the form of true unity.

And saying these things, he asks: "For how can the antitypes be completely equal to the archetypes?" The archetypes are the Triune God, while the antitypes are man and the relationships between men. We cannot find equal analogies between the archetypes and the antitypes. And he concludes: "The formation of truth towards this truth, while not the same in meaning, is seen in equal forms, but is separated not by a chance difference"⁵⁹.

58. See John Romanides: *Critical examination of the adaptations of theology*, in PIPM Thessaloniki 1977, p. 488f (Gk)

59. Cyril of Alexandria: *Commentary on John 11*. PG 74, 556f

8. Conclusion

The conclusion to this whole analysis is that the deified possess existential knowledge of the Holy Trinity, they know, as far as possible, the relationship between the Persons of the Triune God. This is a matter of experience and Revelation and not of conjectures. But then they also use the appropriate terms in order to refute the views of the heretics. In this perspective they speak of essence or nature, person or hypostasis. In spite of their use of these terms, they often say that the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is "incomprehensible and unknowable". This is why they often use apophatic terminology. There cannot be any confusion and correlation between the persons of the Holy Trinity and human persons.

In this analysis we have repeatedly emphasised that the dogma about the mystery of the Holy Trinity is a different thing from the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Man can speak and theologise about the dogma, but there can be no conjecture about the mystery. The mystery is experienced, both as far as it is permitted to man and as far as man partakes of the uncreated energies during the vision of God. The dogma is analysed, because it is a formulation about the Revelation. By means of this combination we avoid falling into agnosticism. The deified man possesses knowledge of God, but he does not become God in essence. The relationships according to nature and essence refer to the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Man is united with the Triune God according to energy and grace.

Man is formed in the image of God. This image refers to the fact that he is in the image of Christ, who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1,15). But since Christ

is always united with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and since the energy of the Triune God is common to them, therefore man united with Christ becomes a dwelling-place of the Holy Trinity. What is of Christ is also of the Father and the Holy Spirit, except the hypostatic characteristics. In the Church we partake of the energy of the Holy Trinity, "in the person of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4,6).

It is a great mistake and a theological error, perhaps a heresy as well, to make conjectures about the trinitarian relationships, to transcend the human and investigate the uncreated God, as it is also a great error to adjust interpersonal and social relationship to the way of being of the Persons of the Holy Trinity and identify with them. One can make analyses concerning love, freedom and unity, but one cannot correlate the love with essence, and freedom with the hypostatic characteristic. Such projections end in arbitrary conclusions and constitute theological conjecture, with terrible consequences for the whole of theology.

These erroneous views come about because the person and personal relations are analysed on the basis of philosophy. I am of the opinion that these errors will be avoided only if the person is investigated with regard to his asceticism and his vision of God.

5

**The saints, bearers
of Divine Revelation**



The saints, bearers of Divine Revelation

In the Orthodox Church we attach great importance to the existence of saints, because they have been united with Christ, they are the true members of the Body of Christ. To be sure, in Christ the two natures, divine and human, have been united unchangingly, inseparably, indivisibly, and thus He is "the only new thing under the sun", as St. John of Damaskos said, for in His hypostasis the created and uncreated have been united without their properties being lost. Thus the only feature common to created and uncreated is the God-man Christ. And the saints who have been united with Christ are living His life and transcending death and all that is human.

Thus there is a genuine humanism which is God-mankind. The humanism which is founded only on the human factor is destined to fail, and indeed is constantly disappointing man. In the Church man can go from the image to the likeness, he can really be fulfilled, achieve his deification by grace, that is to say, become by participation what God is in essence. This is achieved by the sacramental and ascetic life. Therefore we can say that it is not possible for us to understand the person and personality apart from the

persons of the saints, who lived the divine Revelation "in sense perception and full reality".

In what follows we shall look more analytically at three basic points. The first is that the saints are bearers of the divine Revelation, and we shall also find out how this is experienced. The second is that the Holy Fathers of the Church, participating in Pentecost, answered the unsolved questions and problems of ancient Greek philosophy and gave meaning to men's life. We can look at the meeting of Hellenism and Christianity in this light. And the third point is that we have certainty that the saints who attained deification are true persons, because their holy relics exist. The saints' haloes which we see in the holy icons and the sweet-smelling and uncorrupted holy relics manifest the reality that the saints attained the vision of the uncreated Light, deification, and thus they do honour to the human person.

1. The bearers of divine Revelation

The saints are bearers of the divine Revelation and are men who express the Orthodox Tradition. Here we see their great value for humanity. They have given another dimension to life. This is not a question of offering a different ideology, for ideology is inseparably bound up with the totalitarianism which afflicts man, but of offering a life that solves all of man's problems.

When we speak of Revelation, as the word indicates we mean a manifestation. Therefore Revelation is a manifestation of that which was previously hidden and unknown. In contradistinction to discovery, which moves within the bounds of human endeavour and inventiveness, Revelation is a coming to light of what human reason, finite as it is, could not comprehend. The philosophers and sages

through the ages sometimes manage to grasp some things by human inspiration, because their powerful reasoning and their patience make them move somewhat outside the framework in which other men move. However, divine Revelation has manifested things entirely unknown to human reason.

In what follows we shall look more analytically at the great value of the divine Revelation for mankind. But here I would like to emphasise that the saints are bearers of this Revelation which Christ brought to the world. They have lived it within their personal lives and taught it to their flocks; with it they have opposed all the heresies which have appeared through the ages; through it they have conquered death and have even overcome the tyranny of time.

The experience of divine Revelation within the bounds of personal life is called deification in the language of the Church. It is something entirely unknown to the ancient world both as a way of life and as words. It means that man is able not only to worship God, but to become God by grace - not just a superman like Nietzsche's superman, but God by grace. This is the greatest revolution in the history of mankind and the greatest glory of humanism.

Indeed deification is nothing other than participation in the uncreated deifying energy of God. When man struggles to repent, then he participates in the energy of God which purifies him and is called purifying energy, while when he has been illuminated and attained the vision of God, then he partakes of the illuminating and deifying energy of God.

This means that the saints are not just the good people, the noble Christians, the good patriots. Indeed they are good people and noble Christians and good patriots, but they do not stop at these points. Not every good man who practices moral living is a saint, but every saint is a good man, who

lives morally, not because it belongs to his good character and his tradition, but because he has received the holy and most seemly change which the grace of God creates.

In the language of the Church the saints are characterised as "deified". This term is found in the works of many holy Fathers of the Church, as well as in many liturgical hymns. So the word 'deified' is not a creation of contemporary theologians, but contemporary theologians simply brought it back to the surface after it had been forgotten.

The term 'deified' is mentioned in the writings of St. Dionysios the Areopagite and from there it was also taken up by the commentator on these works, St. Maximos the Confessor. At one place St. Dionysios the Areopagite says: "Then let us say, the divine beatitude, divinity by nature, the principle of deification by which it has been granted to the deified to deify the hierarchy by divine goodness, for the salvation and deification of all the rational and noetic beings". In his work "On divine Names" he characterises God as cause and source and essence and life. God is life according to the condition of the one receiving illumination, or "the illumination of the illuminated, and the source of consecration of the consecrated, and the source of deity of the deified, and the simplicity of the simplified". We find the term in many of the holy Fathers, as St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Basil the Great, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John of Damaskos, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, etc.

I would like to mention the characteristic saying of St. Gregory the Theologian that man is a living being who has to develop continuously from biological life towards deification. He must continuously be changed towards becoming deified. This development is called a mystery and comes about through participation in the uncreated grace of God,

which is called illumination. To be sure, even in this case he can never reach the divine essence, but he participates in uncreated grace and becomes God by grace and not by nature¹.

In this sense we say that the saints are bearers of divine Revelation. They receive an entire life, not a mental system. They are not philosophers and conjecturers, but Prophets and theologians. This is substantiated by the miracles which they perform and by their relics. The uncorrupted relics are a sign that these saints have attained deification, that they have become dwelling-places of the living God, they are living temples and images of the Triune God, they are the real members of the Body of Christ and of the Church.

However, the way in which the saints are bearers of the divine Revelation is very important. If we do not see this side, we are in danger of moralising on the one hand, and of scholasticism on the other.

It is a fact that the divine Revelation is inseparably linked with Pentecost, which is the highest degree of divine Revelation. On the day of Pentecost the holy Apostles received the Holy Spirit and became members of the Body of Christ. Therefore we maintain that the source of the faith of the Orthodox Church is the divine Revelation, Pentecost. This means that the saints attained deification and then theologised by divine inspiration and guided their spiritual children unerringly towards deification. Holy Scripture and the holy Tradition are expressions of this revealing experience and cannot be separated from it.

However, while Pentecost happened once in history, it is experienced constantly throughout the ages. All who

1. See analysis in Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos: *Discussions about Orthodox Psychotherapy*, p. 118ff (Greek)

follow the way of "orthodox faith", that is to say, participate in the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God, participate in Pentecost, which, as we said, is the highest degree of Revelation.

There is a wonderful dismissal hymn which is sung for some holy martyrs, such as St. Anthimos, and in whom what was mentioned above appeared.

"And having become a sharer of ways
and successor of thrones of the Apostles,
inspired, you found action, entrance to visions of God;
therefore, rightly expounding the truth,
and having struggled in faith unto blood,
Holy martyr Anthimos:
plead with Christ God,
to save our souls".

In this dismissal hymn the essence of the Orthodox tradition and the characteristic marks of the bearer of the divine Revelation are seen. The saint shared the ways of the holy Apostles, which means that he lived the full apostolic life, since he went through purification and arrived at deification and as a result became a successor to the thrones of the Apostles. This means that the Apostolic Tradition and succession is certainly a series of consecrations, but at the same time also a participation in the apostolic life.

It is significant that this dismissal hymn presents the way in which St. Anthimos became a successor of the Apostles in life and in high-priesthood. And this way is action (praxis) and vision of God (theoria). 'Praxis' in the patristic tradition is purification of the heart from passions, and 'theoria' is the illumination of the nous and the vision of God. They do not refer to mission and mental conjecture, as the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages interprets

these terms. Thus the vision of God enters upon action, and this is the evidence of its genuineness.

This life has two consequences. The first is that the saint proves to be God-inspired, rightly dividing the word of truth. The right dividing of the truth is not a mental construction. Indeed, if anyone does not have his own personal revelation, then he rightly divides by repeating the revealing experience of the saints. In any case this truth of the faith requires personal conviction, such as that person has who has attained illumination of his nous and deification. The second consequence is that then he can bear witness unto blood for the faith. This means that the martyrdom of the saints is not a result of a strong desire, but a fruit of the vision of God. The martyr is strengthened by the uncreated grace of God and thus offers testimony and suffers martyrdom.

Under these preconditions the saint can plead with God for the salvation of our souls, he can even perform miracles, his body can become a holy relic, because it is indwelt by the grace of God.

2. The value of divine Revelation

The deified, that is to say the saints, also show the great value of divine Revelation, because it answered all the unsolved everlasting problems which occupied the noblest spirits of mankind. This is seen clearly in the works of the holy Fathers of the Church.

Nowadays much is being said about the Greek Orthodox Tradition, about the connection between Christianity and Hellenism. Actually the holy Fathers did achieve this connection between Hellenism and Christianity, but not as it is imagined and analysed by various people who do not

know about it at depth. We can, however, make some general remarks.

Ancient Greek philosophy asked many ontological, cosmological, etc. questions. It was intensely occupied with existence, what is Being, what is the essence and meaning of the world, what is the evil which exists in the world. As they endeavoured to answer these tragic and existential questions, they came to different conclusions. Each philosopher, in accordance with the school which he was expressing, moved in a particular context. Judaic theology did not answer these ontological and cosmological problems of Greek philosophy, because it did not confront them. It was concerned, not with what the world is, but with who is the creator of the world. Looking at the world, the Jew lifted his thought to God and glorified Him.

It was precisely the Revelation as lived by the holy Fathers which answered these crucial questions of ancient Greek philosophy. The Fathers studied the questions of the philosophers. They became aware of the very deep meaning of these ontological and cosmological problems and made a distinction "between the questions and the answers of Greek civilisation". The questions of the Greek philosophers were essential, while their answers were erroneous. So the Fathers kept their questions and gave answers imbued with divine Revelation. And for the first time the Greeks were receiving essential answers which were not Greek. This is really a transformation of Hellenism, beginning with the Apostolic Fathers of the second century and continuing to the Fathers of the fourth century. Of course St. Maximos the Confessor also belongs to this category².

2. See John Zizioulas, "Hellenism and Christianity, the meeting of the two worlds", in *History of the Greek nation*, vol. 6, p. 554 (Gk)

Through this intervention of the holy Fathers who were the bearers of the divine Revelation, Hellenism acquired a different orientation and was transformed completely.

a) The cosmological problem

A characteristic example in which this Christianised Hellenism is seen and for which it is esteemed, is the subject of cosmology. "From its first gleams of light in history, the Greek spirit had not ceased to be occupied with the cosmological question, that of the source and establishment of the beings which constitute the world"³. This question is of course very essential. But in answering it, the Greek philosophers mainly stopped "at this existence of the world and the establishment of its harmony, not its temporal or historical beginning"⁴. The holy Fathers of the Church, however, in answering this fundamental problem, apart from the fact that they emphasised that the creator of the world is God, said at the same time that "the meaning of the world, the cosmological "principle", is to be found in the purpose of the world, in that to which Christ's Resurrection points, without making this purpose a static and invariable state of the world"⁵.

In order to make clear this new understanding which Christianity was offering to Hellenism, we can say that the Fathers, having the Revelation, were not content simply to say that God was the Creator of the world, but they went on to other points as well. One of these is that the world was created out of nothing, "out of non-existent

3. Ibid. p. 538

4. Ibid. p. 540

5. Ibid.

material". This was a real scandal for ancient Greek philosophy, which believed in the eternity of matter and in natural immortality. And the creation of the world did not have such great importance as did its renewal and transformation, which was taking place and would be completed still later in the future, by the Resurrection of Christ. No one can really look at the world apart from Christ's Resurrection, the Reign of God, and apart from the Divine Eucharist, which is the experience of the last things.

The new thing which patristic teaching brought to our subject is the change from cosmology to the study of creation, where we see the creative encounter of Christianity with Hellenism⁶. In the Greek language there is a clear difference between the two words for creation: 'demiourgia' and 'ktisis'. The word 'demiourgos' means an artisan, one who decorates an existing thing. The word 'cosmos' means an ornament. So the "demiourgos of the cosmos" chiefly signifies the decorator, the artisan⁷. This produces ancient Greek philosophy's view that God created the world out of existing material, that the cosmos is related to the unchanging world of ideas and is more an elaboration, a decorating. But the word 'ktisis' chiefly points to someone who brings to light, who creates something that did not exist before. Therefore in the language of the Church the word 'ktisis' is used much more than 'cosmos'. And when we speak of the creation of the world, we must place it in the orthodox framework, which means the making of creation out of non-existing material.

Then the holy Fathers, answering the questions of the ancient Greek philosophers about the essence and cause

6. Ibid.

7. Liddell & Scott dictionary vol. 1 p. 575-576 (Gk)

of beings, spoke of the 'logoi' of beings, which are not Plato's ideas nor Aristotle's forms, but the uncreated energy of God which maintains the whole creation. This means that there are no created laws in creation, but there are uncreated 'logoi', the uncreated energy of God that directs it towards a definite goal, that of its renewal, its transformation into a new heaven and a new earth, into a new creation.

Another interesting point which shows how Christianity met Hellenism on the subject of cosmology is that of the motion and fixity of creation. The ancient Greek philosophers, attempting to explain the existence of evil in the world, said that the world as we see and know it, is a fall from the world of ideas. The soul fell from the world of ideas, and therefore God punished it by imprisoning it in the body, so its salvation is to depart from the body, which is evil.

This Platonic system of interpretation of the world also influenced some Christians of the first centuries, who clearly represented a "Hellenised Christianity". Origen, for example, said that the whole world is a consequence of the soul's motion due to the sin which it committed when it was in a bodiless pre-existence. "First there was motion, then came the birth of the world and the bodies, and then the fixity in God of the souls released from their bodies"⁸. Developing this theme, St. Maximos the Confessor changed the order of things. While in ancient thought there is motion, becoming, fixity, he reversed the series, putting becoming first, then motion and finally fixity, which is ever-moving. This means that the creation of the world is not a

8. Demetrios Staniloae, on St. Maximos the Confessor's "philosophical and theological questions", vol. I, p. 22 (Gk)

result of motion, but God's positive creative work. God created the world, and put motion into it in order for it to attain transformation and renewal, and this communion with God is not a fixed state, but a dynamic motion⁹. Man was created good by God and then slipped away from communion with God. This was a fall.

The things that we have said so far show in reality how the creative meeting of Christianity with Hellenism is to be understood. When we speak of Helleno-Christianity or a Helleno-Orthodox tradition, we do not mean that both offered some things and one new hotch-potch came into being, nor do we mean that Christianity used the Greek language, but as we explained briefly before, Christianity through the holy Fathers answered the unanswered questions of the ancient philosophers. The holy Fathers made a clear distinction between the questions and answers of Greek philosophy. They gave answers to the questions of the ancient philosophers within their experience of divine Revelation, and thus Hellenism was entirely transformed, renewed, baptised in the Font of the Church. Judaism did not do this, nor could it, because it did not use the Greek categories of thought.

Moreover, this is why even today we cannot comprehend Hellenism apart from Orthodoxy. In fact, any Hellenism outside the Orthodox Tradition is ossified, incapable of satisfying man's spirit, powerless to offer meaning and life to man.

9. Ibid. p. 22-23

b) Being and becoming

The value of the divine Revelation is seen still more expressively in the great discussion which took place in antiquity, but it is also continuing today with regard to the difference and relationship between "being" and "becoming". It is a serious philosophical and theological problem, but also an existential one. Here too it seems that Christianity has given sound and complete answers which Hellenic philosophy could not give.

The whole of classical and modern metaphysics has been concerned with the difference, opposition, but also unification, between being and becoming¹⁰. Being is associated with stability, while becoming is associated with motion, and this is the difference between them. From the metaphysical standpoint "b e i n g" indicates the absolute, permanent reality, regardless of any experience and in contrast to b e c o m i n g"¹¹. What is becoming ceases to be, and when it has being, then it ceases to become. While being indicates permanent reality, becoming, "in contrast to being, means the transition from 'being thus' to 'being otherwise', it means the change, the transition, from one state to another"¹².

In classical metaphysics there are two different traditions about this. In one tradition, as it was expressed by the Eleatics, who took their name from the city Elea in southern Italy where this philosophical school was founded, it was accepted that being is "unified, simple and un-

10. See extended analysis in Presbyter Nikolaos Ludovikos: *Eucharistic ontology*. Athens 1992, p. 251ff (Gk)

11. Androutsos, *Dictionary of philosophy*, 1965, p. 114 (Gk)

12. *Ibid.* p. 84

changeable, and they regarded the multiple, motion and becoming as a sense deception"¹³. The basic representative of this school is Parmenides, who believed that becoming is a deception "and that only the unmoving and unchanging being exists"¹⁴. In another tradition, of which Herakleitos is regarded as representative, it was accepted that the essence of beings is becoming, and all beings are "points that only appear permanent in the change of states of becoming"¹⁵. Therefore Herakleitos' basic axiom was "all is flux".

This contrast in pre-Socratic thought on the subject of being and becoming was continued later as well. Plato said that only the ideas are unchanging, while Aristotle said that becoming consists in the fact that matter takes on a definite form, which pre-exists and which constitutes its goal¹⁶. But even to this day the whole of subsequent metaphysics has been concerned with this problem.

I think that it should be emphasised particularly that the contribution of Christianity also comes in at this point. The holy Fathers answered the question completely. In St. Dionysios the Areopagite and in St. Maximos the Confessor, who commented on him, it is clear that orthodox theology cannot be a philosophy, and certainly not metaphysics, it cannot be Platonic or neo-Platonic. This is explained in the following very simple way. In ancient philosophy Being is unchanging, and it really means God. The things that are, are becoming and have motion. Metaphysics could never accept that Being moves. Nor could metaphysics ever

13. Ibid. p. 118

14. Ibid. p. 84

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. p. 84

accept that Being can have erotic force, because erotic force, which is a return of beings from motion to fixed and unchanging being, to the world of ideas, is a weakness. Thus on this subject we see the two basic dogmas of metaphysics. One is that Being does not move, the other that Being does not love, since love and erotic force are an expression of motion and weakness. However, the holy Fathers have emphasised the truth that God (Being) moves towards man and loves.

A passage in St. Maximos the Confessor, who takes up the thought of Dionysios the Areopagite, is characteristic: "Theologians call the divine sometimes an erotic force, sometimes love, sometimes that which is intensely longed for and loved. Consequently, as an erotic force and as love, the divine itself is subject to movement; and as that which is intensely longed for and loved it moves towards itself everything that is receptive of this force and love"¹⁷. The divine Being has erotic force and love and moves towards man. But at the same time He draws towards Himself those who are receptive to divine love. Here there is no room for classical metaphysics, because it is essentially overthrown. The Fathers use the Greek philosophers' categories of thought, but transform them completely, and therefore we cannot call them philosophers, precisely because they overthrow all the axioms of classical metaphysics.

This contrast between being and becoming in ancient classical metaphysics constitutes a serious problem. Windelband points this out very clearly: "the becoming of Herakleitos does not generate any being - just as Parmenides' being does not generate any becoming. In reality the Eleatics' teaching about being, apart from multiplicity

17. *Philokalia* vol. 2, p. 280, 84

and change, excludes even becoming. According to their metaphysics, becoming is inconceivable, it is impossible"¹⁸.

This questioning which starts from the opposition between being and becoming is deep and existential. It is not a philosophical and therefore intellectual topic, but a deep existential problem. We could put some questions. If being does not move, as Parmenides said, how is it possible to be perfect, how is it possible to exist and how is it possible to have association and be associated with? Since it does not move, how is it possible not to fall into nonbeing, into nothingness? If it is not moved, then how can it move?¹⁹ If becoming is separated from being, then different questions are put, such as "what is the beginning of becoming and why should there be becoming" and how is it guaranteed that the movement will be positive and not negative?²⁰

These topics indeed relate to the purpose of the existence of man. What is his beginning, what is his end, how can he develop, what determines this development? If stable Being does not exist, then who determines morality, law, and all the other good things? We cannot understand the theological teaching about "the image and likeness" in any other way. The image is something given, which is connected with the fact that man is an image of the image of God, who is Christ, while the likeness is closely connected with deification, motion towards God.

A great deal is also being said in our time about "social becoming", about the transformation, renewal, change, progress of society. But the questions are being put very insistently. What is the source of this movement and de-

18. See Nikolaos Ludovikos, *op. cit.* p. 253

19. *Ibid.* p. 256

20. *Ibid.* p. 255

velopment? What is the being that determines it? Can becoming exist without being? And finally, what is this stable being? Is it a matter of impersonal laws or personified passions? How is the nature of this movement, of the progress of society, determined? How is negative motion avoided? How is this movement, social becoming, related to man? Is it impersonal movement? What is the goal of social becoming?

This shows that the social problems are not supposed to be examined apart from philosophy. And since philosophy has left questions unanswered, or at least has not been able to answer them satisfactorily, they must be answered within theology.

The great contemporary German philosopher Heidegger attempted to bridge the difference between Being and becoming. In his book "Introduction to metaphysics" he essentially tries to interpret what is Being and what is the meaning of that which is. The whole of classical metaphysics had been concerned with this question. After asserting that essentially there is no great opposition between Parmenides and Herakleitos²¹, he goes on to investigate three other distinctions. The second distinction after the first (being and becoming) is the distinction between "Being and appearance". "The apparent is that which from time to time emerges and vanishes, the ephemeral and unstable over against being as the permanent"²². The third distinction which he introduces is "Being and thinking", because "becoming and appearance are defined in the perspective of thought". From the standpoint of "evaluating thought"

21. Martin Heidegger: *An introduction to metaphysics*. London 1959, p. 97

22. *Ibid.* p. 98

which expresses something permanent, "becoming appears as impermanence"²³. He dwells on this distinction between Being and thinking, because it "is still the sustaining ground, the basis on which Being is determined"²⁴. If Being, over against thought, "is the underlying, the already there", then Being, over against "the ought", which is the fourth distinction, "is the datum, the ought that is not yet realised or already realised"²⁵.

In developing his thought, Heidegger is essentially commenting critically on the whole of metaphysics and is maintaining that the idea of Being which has prevailed until now "to name everything that is" is not enough²⁶. Therefore he extends the study and research on the question of what is Being, because the question of what is man is determined by it²⁷. When one studies only the beings, forgetting Being, this is really nihilism²⁸.

But in the end Heidegger cannot avoid the problem of classical and modern metaphysics, because in any case he is relying very much on human thought. However, his views are interesting, because they show that the definition of the essence of man is not "the product of an arbitrary anthropology that considers man in basically the same way as zoology considers animals", but the definition of the essence of man lies in the answer to the question of Being²⁹.

These great questions of classical and modern metaphysics, in the tragic distinction and opposition between

23. Ibid. p. 195

24. Ibid. p. 204

25. Ibid. p. 202

26. Ibid. p. 204

27. Ibid. p. 204f

28. Ibid. p. 202

29. Ibid. p. 205

Being and becoming were given answers by the holy Fathers of the Church, who, to be sure, had the experience of divine Revelation. Between Being and becoming there is communing³⁰. That is to say, man is God's creation, and after the fall he can attain deification, precisely because he is in the image, and there is the Godman Christ. Christ is the only bridge between uncreated and created, because in His hypostasis He unites the divine with human nature without change, confusion, separation or division. Thus the members of the Church, who are members of the body of Christ, can share in the communion of the eucharistic meal, and eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ. Therefore "becoming is inseparable from communing, just as communing is inseparable from being"³¹.

Through the mystery of the divine Eucharist man attains communion and union with Christ. In communion with Him he fulfills the purpose of his existence. He lives fixed motion and ever-moving fixity, according to St. Maximos the Confessor. It is not at all strange that St. Maximos the Confessor in his "Mystagogy" associates man's ascetic movement from the sensory world to the intelligible and to the experience of the last things through the divine Eucharist. So "there is no longer being and becoming, becoming and being; there is being as personal becoming in communion. Without communing there is no being, without becoming there is no communing, and conversely, without the communion of persons there is no becoming; without becoming there is no being, just as without being, as personal life, there is no becoming or communing"³².

30. Nikolaos Ludovikos, *op. cit.* p. 261ff.

31. *Ibid.* p. 263

32. *Ibid.* p. 271

Through these examples - and there are many others - one can see the great value of divine Revelation and the importance of the existence of our saints. The saints have given answers to all the questions which have been put by the human spirit, and this is why they are the most genuine men. In the characteristic expression of Fr. Demetrios Staniloae, the Church's mission is to function "as a workshop of resurrection"³³. The relics of the saints demonstrate this fact. The Church is a hospital, but also a workshop of resurrection, a workshop of relics.

In this light we understand at last that Hellenism cannot be released from Christianity. The release of Hellenism from the Church is its real suicide, since it will be left alone with the unanswered questions. And the philosophers' research without the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church can offer nothing, because it will leave the human spirit hungry and thirsty. Classical and modern metaphysics are played out in the West as well. It is naive to approach Western contemporaries through their own data. The Fathers surpassed the great ancient philosophers because they confronted their questions and gave answers within the experience of the divine Revelation. The great philosophers can penetrate as far as the Narthex of the Church intended for the use of the Catechumens, but it is the holy Hierarchs who enter the central Temple and the holy Sanctuary, for the very reason that they are living the "eucharistic ontology of becoming in communion"³⁴. Man is really a being when he partakes of the Being and lives the real life, when he is linked with Christ, Who "makes being really be being", in the real communion which is the divine Eucharist.

33. Ibid. p. 270

34. Ibid. p. 261

3. Theology and the pastoral care of the holy relics

In the foregoing analysis there was a slight reference to the great value of the holy relics, because the Orthodox Church is a "workshop of resurrection" and it could also be said that it is a workshop of holy relics. In what follows I would like to deal with this point more extensively, because I consider it very important.

The revelation and manifestation of God which is offered to the saints comes through deification. A man receives the Revelation because he partakes of the uncreated deifying energy of God. Thus Revelation is intimately linked with man's deification. The highest degree of divine Revelation is Pentecost. When man reaches deification, he is wholly deified in soul and body, and this is why we have the existence of the grace-abounding and imperishable relics. The holy, imperishable and wonder-working relics testify to the truth of Revelation and the experience of deification.

It is very characteristic that a visitor to the Monasteries of the Holy Mountain will discover that the greatest compliment that one can receive from the monks is to be invited to kiss the holy relics. Even the smallest cell on the Holy Mountain has holy relics. And the visitor to it is taken first of all into the Holy Shrine to kiss them, because they are the cell's greatest possession and blessing.

The presence of the grace of God in the holy relics is shown in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is by their incorruption, sometimes by their fragrance, sometimes by miracles, and so forth, and it is perceived by those who have faith and pure spiritual senses.

St. Symeon the New Theologian explains very graphi-

cally why not all the bodies of the saints are uncorrupted and why they do not all yet contain the signs and life of resurrection. An analysis of this aspect will show the value of the holy relics, but will also manifest the operation by which they are sanctified.

St. Symeon teaches that what happens through the bodies of the saints is the same as what happens when fire and iron are united. When the iron is made fiery by the fire, it loses its dark colouring and partakes of the brilliance of the fire, while when it is separated from the fire, "it turns cold and dark again". It is the same with the saints. When their souls are united with divine grace, their bodies too are sanctified "and burn incandescent, and become themselves translucent, and are restored as more excellent, more precious by far, than other bodies". But when the souls are separated from the bodies, then some of them are given over to corruption and "begin shortly to dissolve". "But still such bodies may remain for many years, neither wholly incorrupt, nor again quite corrupted, but keeping yet the indications each of corruption and incorruption, being preserved for the final resurrection, when they shall be made perfectly new and incorruptible". This means that some of the bodies of the saints who have attained deification have the indications of both corruption and incorruption, because they await their complete renewal and resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ, when their souls will be united with their sanctified bodies.

In going on to explain why this happens, he says that the bodies of the saints did not have to gain complete incorruption before the renewal of all creatures. Since the created world was first brought into existence by God as incorrupt, and then man, it means that "it is creation which must first be transformed from corruption into incorrup-

tion, changed, and then, together with it and at the same time, the corrupted bodies of men will be renewed"³⁵. Through this teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian we understand well that the bodies of the saints receive the grace of God when man attains deification. But the grace of God which remains in the holy relics is manifested in various ways. In any case, the holy relics of those saints that remain incorrupt are between decay and incorruption, awaiting their perfect incorruption, immortality, resurrection and complete change, after the return of the souls to the bodies, at the Second Coming of Christ.

It is in this light that we should look at what is going to be said next about the theology of the holy relics and their messages for our time. The holy relics of the saints are a herald of the coming resurrection, they are an experience now of the future beatitude, that is to say they are a resurrection before the final resurrection of men, a prologue to men's life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore the holy relics of the saints are our only answers to the contemporary ontological, anthropological, social, cosmological and ecological problems.

a) The so-called *o n t o l o g i c a l* questions - what is Being, what is the Being - have always, even from earliest times, been of deep concern to man. We have already seen something about man's theological searching in the preceding analyses of the difference between Being and becoming, and the way in which men have philosophised about these problems. A little of man's theological search has been seen.

35. St. Symeon the New Theologian: *On the Mystical life. The ethical discourses*. Vol. 1: *The Church and the last things*. SVS 1995, p. 34f. (SC 122, p. 202-204)

The scholastic theology of the Middle Ages, which was a successor of classical metaphysics, attempting to understand God rationally, developed various proofs concerning His existence. The truths of faith were divided into natural and supernatural ones. About the first, in which the existence of God is also included, it said that these can be proven philosophically, while the second, the supernatural, in which they included the trinitarianness of God, it said that they can be proven not to be illogical. So then they developed four proofs of the existence of God: ontological, cosmological, teleological and ethical.

According to the ontological proof, developed by Anselm of Canterbury, God is the highest being that can be conceived. But if the description of God does not correspond to the reality, then it is nothing, that is to say it is not highest being, since that which really exists is higher than "that which exists only in the intellect". Therefore the idea of God as idea of highest being contains within it also the reality of the subject to which it refers. Anselm, starting from man's idea of God as highest being, ends by saying that it is not possible for God not to exist in reality. Gaunilo and Kant regard this proof as a sophism or a simple witticism³⁶. According to this proof, the idea existing in man's soul of the highest God demonstrates His existence.

Apart from the ontological proof there is also the cosmological proof, according to which the existence of the world points to the existence of the "necessary and immutable being" according to the law of causality³⁷.

According to the teleological proof of the existence of God the order and harmony in the world manifest the ex-

36. Christos Androutsos, *Dictionary of philosophy*, p. 37 (Gk)

37. *Ibid.* p. 46

istence of a purposefulness. However, this purposefulness is not attributable to the beings which are subject to it. Hence the proof that apart from the beings there is the "creative cause of order"³⁸.

Finally, according to the moral proof, the moral order of the world presupposes the existence of a moral law³⁹. That is to say, it is not possible for injustice to be rewarded 'ad infinitum', nor for the just and justice to remain unrewarded. God will restore the moral order. He will punish the wicked and reward the good.

These proofs were outlined by scholastic philosophy and we have to say that apart from the several truths which they contain, they cannot be acceptable from the orthodox point of view, precisely because they presuppose man's logic as the centre and source of knowledge. In the patristic teaching one can trace passages which also have some of the conclusions of scholastic theology, but the method of approach to these topics is different.

In orthodox theology we speak of the existence of God within the witness of the saints who had reached the Revelation, the vision of God. The certainty of the existence of God comes from the witness of the saints and from their holy relics. Thus our own proofs of the existence of God are not ruled by logic, but are experiential and tangible. That is to say, we approach the holy relics and are convinced of the existence of God because the grace of God is working and performing miracles through them.

St. John Chrysostom, speaking to his flock, says that we must not only see the dust, nor think that this is just ashes and bones, but "see the power of God seated beside

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

them, the grace of the Spirit surrounding them, the glory of the heavenly light wrapping them round"⁴⁰. The power of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit, exists in the holy relics. That is to say, they are not ordinary bones, but holy relics, which have God's energy.

The teachings of many holy Fathers of the Church are also in this framework. I would like to mention the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas. Referring to the coffin containing the relics of St. Demetrios the Fragrant, he calls him a fount of God, "filled with fragrance and wonders and cures"⁴¹. In the holy relics of the saints there is the glory from God which is with him all the time. He asks: Who can worthily praise this divine glory which is found in the relics of the saints, "the holy fragrance given off from them, the perfumes which gush forth, the gifts of grace of the cures, the miraculous actions of the powers, the manifold and saving manifestations to us through them?"⁴². God bestows the fount of the perfumes, the relics of St. Demetrios. That is why we must proclaim everywhere "the power and energy of this divine perfume"⁴³.

However, St. Gregory Palamas also presents the theological meaning of the holy relics, because with the coming of uncreated grace the bodies of the saints become members of the Body of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. So what happened through Christ also happens correspondingly through the saints. When He died on the Cross, His soul, but not His divinity, was separated from His body. Therefore His soul went down to hell with His divinity

40. PG 50, 617 On the holy Maccabeans. Homily 1, 1

41. Gregory Palamas: Homily 49,19. EPE 11, p. 186

42. Gregory Palamas: Homily 25,6. EPE 10, p. 134

43. Gregory Palamas: Homily 50,13. EPE 11, p. 210

and the Body remained in the tomb, uncorrupted, with His divinity. We see this also in the holy relics of the saints. In spite of the separation of the soul from the body, the grace of God has not been separated, but has remained in their bodies, and thus they have manifested the marks of the indwelling energy of God. He writes: "for God's grace is not sundered from these things, even as the divinity was not sundered from Christ's venerable body at the time of His life-quickenning death"⁴⁴.

As St. Nicholas Kavalas also teaches, the saints' relics are a true temple of God and a real altar, while the holy Temple made with hands is an image of the real: "In addition, these bones are a true temple of God and an altar, while that which was made with hands is the imitation of the real"⁴⁵. This is why the holy altar is sanctified by holy relics of martyrs, and these alone are placed on the paten where the Body of Christ is placed. This is done because the relics of the saints are the true members of the Body of Christ.

All these things testify that the holy relics are not a sign, but a proof of the existence of God. And this is because they show that the particular man attained deification and saw God. Because in his life he followed the method of orthodox devotion which is action and illumination, he also attained the vision of God. When someone exposes his body to the sun, he has signs of the fact, for his body is sun-burned. The same thing is true of the holy relics. They are a proof and manifestation of the existence of God. This is why the teaching of the particular saint is divinely inspired. Thus the orthodox teaching and the existence of his relics

44. Gregory Palamas: *Philokalia* vol. 4, p. 325

45. Nicholas Kavalas: *On the Life of Christ*. Book 5,6. SVS, p. 157

are proofs of deification and therefore proofs of the existence of God.

b) Along with the solution of the ontological-theological problem, the holy relics also give answers to the so-called anthropological problem. Ancient philosophy was always trying to see the problem of the being in connection with the problem of the Being. God was characterised as Being and men and all created things were characterised as "beings". Man's spirit has always been occupied with such questions as what is man, where does he come from, where will he end, what is the meaning of his life. And it is precisely in the relics of the saints that we see clearly the solution to these problems.

In orthodox theology we say that after his fall man lost communion with God, his nous was darkened, he perceived the nakedness of his soul and body, and he needed to hide his nakedness. Then God sewed garments of skin. According to the teaching of the holy Fathers the garments of skin point to the corruption and mortality which Adam bore after his fall. St. Andrew, Bishop of Crete, in his Great Canon, expressively presented this terrible anthropological event of the fall. "Sin has stripped me of the robe that God once wove for me, and He has woven for me garments of skin". "I am clad in a garment that is defiled and shamefully blood-stained by a life of passion and self-indulgence"⁴⁶.

With the coming of Christ human nature returns to its original beauty and with holy Baptism man is clothed in his first robe, the grace of the Holy Spirit: "as many as have been baptised in Christ have put on Christ". We see this clearly in the holy relics, as the holy Fathers also teach.

46. The Lenten Triodion. Faber & Faber, p. 382

The holy Chrysostom says that when the demons, who are the true robbers, see the bodies of the martyrs, they immediately make their escape and depart, "for they are not seeing this temporarily mortal nature, but the ineffable value of the Christ who bore these things"⁴⁷. Man's nature is mortal and created, but when it bore the ineffable power of Christ, it discarded corruption and mortality. And again the holy Chrysostom says that we should not see the bodies of the holy martyrs bereft of the energy of their souls, because another power is present which is greater than the soul, and this is "the grace of the holy Spirit"⁴⁸.

Thus the holy relics show that man was not created bad in the beginning, that his body is not evil, that salvation is not found in the departure of the soul from the body, as was taught by ancient philosophy, that man's potential extends to deification by grace, that he can throw off corruption and mortality, in other words, the garments of skin, that the grace of God is conveyed from the soul to the body, that man consists of soul and body, and many other great truths.

St. Gregory Palamas, speaking of St. Demetrios, says that his holy relics and the fragrance of the perfume show very manifestly to all that the saint "while still in this life was a fragrance of Christ and a fragrance of life for those eager to obey"⁴⁹. Man's deification is experienced already in this life. Therefore the relics are a confirmation and proof of a man's deification and holiness. In the Orthodox Church we do not rely on outward signs and criteria, nor on a moral life, in order to be assured of a man's holiness, but we

47. On the Holy Maccabeans. Homily 1,1. PG 50,617

48. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain: New Ladder, p. 109 (Greek)

49. Gregory Palamas. Homily 49,10. EPE 11, p. 174

rely first and foremost on his relics. It is the only certainty that he was united with Christ and had become a Temple of the All-holy Spirit.

And of course when we see a man's relics perform miracles, then we study his life as well in order to have an example and make him a pattern for our life. Then we understand that this particular saint used the appropriate method for attaining deification. Just as we understand from the results of a piece of research whether the appropriate data and the true scientific method were used, so also from the relics we understand the rightness of the life. In this way we imitate this particular saint, we invoke his advocacy, because we know that he was pleasing to God. If these signs are not present in the relics, then everything is uncertain: his way of life, his relationship with God and the ability of his prayers to have power.

c) The answer to the anthropological problem is also connected with the answer to the social problem, because man is the centre of society, and the social problems cannot be solved without him. Our tendency to struggle for the solution to social problems by finding the suitable social system, without solving the anthropological problems, belongs to the western mentality. In the West people try to find the most successful social system, because they believe that then they will solve man's problems as well. But in Orthodoxy, without ignoring the improvement of social conditions, we give priority to man's renewal and regeneration.

One of the greatest social problems is death. Every man at his birth carries within him corruptibility and mortality, which in reality constitute the garments of skin. At his biological birth a person comes into the world who is a gift of God, but at the same time he is also a being who is

going to die. Only the time of his death differs for each man. Thus death also creates many social problems.

We all have experience of this fact. Death spreads much pain among men, it separates their loved ones. Everyone, according to his spiritual and psychological maturity, spends a certain amount of time trying to be able to overcome the pain of parting because of death. The process of mourning is a life in martyrdom.

The holy relics show that the overcoming of death is a reality. We understand well that the teaching that Christ conquered death is very true. When someone venerates the saints' relics, such as those of St. John the Forerunner, St. Anna, Mother of our Panagia, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Spyridon, St. Gerasimos, St. Dionysios, which remained partly or wholly uncorrupted, then he really understands that there is no death. The relics manifest the reality that death is a sleep. The saints are simply sleeping until the Second coming of Christ and the common resurrection.

Further, the most tantalising social problem is the very restrictive character of time. Time is a great enemy of man. Some people lack the time they need for achieving something they want to do, and others do not know how to fill their time. The saints' relics also manifest the overcoming of this tantalising problem of time, because they live in eternity.

Further, the Christians know from their own personal experience that the relics of the saints, precisely because they have in them the grace of the All-holy Spirit, alleviate their pain and cure them of illnesses of their bodies and souls. In short, we say that through the relics God helps men in various ways.

St. John of Damaskos says that Christ gave the relics of

the saints as saving fountains "which in divers manners pour out benefactions and gush with fragrant ointment"⁵⁰. Theodoritos of Kyros says that while the souls of the martyrs go about in heaven, dancing with the angels, their bodies are not simply in a tomb, for they have also been distributed to cities and villages. And thus the people call the martyrs saviours of souls and bodies, and venerate them as patron saints and guardians. And this happens because "the undivided grace of even a divided body remains, and even that very small relic has the same power as a piece of evidence which has not been divided in any way"⁵¹.

St. Gregory Palamas, speaking of Christ's cure of the man possessed of a demon, says that we too should approach the relics and be sanctified by them after we have abandoned "irrevocably the ill-smelling life of sin". And then he writes: "and having been sanctified and empowered by the use of them, let us too proclaim..."⁵². By venerating the relics of the saints a man is sanctified in proportion to his spiritual condition. That is to say, if he is in the stage of purification he experiences the purifying energy of God, if he is in illumination he partakes of the illuminating energy and if he is being deified, he receives God's deifying energy.

Of course when a man is sanctified, he becomes a social factor as well, he functions rightly in society, in his family and in all his interpersonal relations. In this light we can see the great social work of the holy relics. Apart from their various good works, protecting the cities and lands, at the same time they are helping man towards sanctification.

50. *The Orthodox Faith*. Book 4, ch. 15, p. 368

51. *Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain: New Ladder*, p. 109 (Greek)

52. Homily 50,13. *EPE* vol. 11, p. 210

d) Man's rebirth and renewal are also echoed in the so-called *c o s m o l o g i c a l* and *e c o l o g i c a l* problem. Everyone is talking about the pollution of the environment, about the decay that is going on in nature, about ecological disaster. Men are trying in various ways to alleviate these problems. Indeed no one can ignore this rationalistic confrontation of the subject in order for the conditions of life to be improved.

But orthodox theology looks at the matter more deeply. It teaches that the fall of man had profound cosmological repercussions, just as every sin does as well. Creation has no moral will, and therefore it did not fall into decay of itself. Man made wrong use of his freedom, with the result that he dragged the whole creation along into decay and death. Thus, as the Apostle Paul also says, "the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now" (Rom. 8,22) but it too is waiting for its freedom.

Just as man's loss of the grace of God had consequences for creation as well, so also divine grace passes through man into the irrational world as well. There are many examples which testify to this. The grace of God performed miracles through the shadow of the Apostle Paul, and also through the kerchiefs of the Apostles. Even the wild animals obey a sanctified man, as we see in the lives of many ascetics and saints. And this is natural. Moreover the word 'ecology' means the word about the house, that is to say, the relationship of living organisms to their environment. When man is sanctified, then his relations with the environment are also restored.

We can also look at the value of the holy relics of our Church in this perspective. They point to the renewed creation, but also to the blessing which they offer to the world. And this explains the miracles which God performs through

the garments worn by the saints, through the dust of their tombs, and so forth. Also the whole area where the relics of the saints remain is sanctified. Even if we consider that the holy relics do not contaminate nature, do not give off bad odours, but fragrance, in this sense too we see their contribution to creation.

Moreover, as we said before, the holy relics are a prologue to the renewal of creation which will happen in the future life, with the Second Coming of Christ. Man is closely connected with creation. St. Symeon the New Theologian explains that first creation will be renewed and changed, transformed from corruption to incorruption, and at the same time the saints' corrupted bodies will be renewed, "such that, himself become at once spiritual and immortal, man may have an incorrupt, and spiritual and everlasting country in which to make his home"⁵³.

Thus, finally, the whole theology of our Church is to be found in the teaching and existence of the holy relics. In these matters the Church is doing a great and effective pastoral work. Indeed it is enough that the offering of the holy relics should take place in the framework of this theological development and that there should not be other alien and subordinate purposes (such as collecting money, etc.), because then their beneficial presence is spoiled.

To conclude the subject I could say deductively that the divine Revelation has great value for contemporary life. It is not a question of ideas and theories, nor does it simply look to an improvement of the social conditions, but it is a matter of true life, as is seen in the teaching of the saints and their holy relics. Thus it responds to all the existential

53. *Op. cit.*, p. 35

and social problems of contemporary restless man. The deified are the only answer to all the wearying and unbearable problems of our time. The holy relics are proofs and evidence of the true life, which the Church has.

If we wish to answer the question what is the Church and what is its purpose we can say: The Church is a workshop for the restoration of man, and its purpose is to make holy relics.

6

The morality of freedom and the freedom of morality



The morality of freedom and the freedom of morality

In our time systems are often arising and appearing which express men's leanings towards freedom. The bitter taste of servitude has led many people to thirst for freedom. They seek it on all the levels of life, religious, political, social and national.

However, there are two great dangers in this seeking. The first danger is that people are looking for complete liberation, which ends in anarchy. This anarchy is ravaging contemporary societies. The second danger is that in the name of freedom a new form of slavery is appearing. Contemporary man can use all the ways and means to dominate. Thus anarchy and dictatorship are two dangers which are ravaging the people of today.

It is necessary, then, to have a true definition of freedom and to describe the conditions for it. This will be taken up in the present chapter. Of course I know clearly that this great subject will not be exhausted in what is to be said here. Just a few points will be underlined and a few hints will be made for further elaboration. We shall deal mostly with the theological aspect and interpretation of freedom. This is essential because, while a great deal is

being said about the freedom of the senses, reason and morality, nothing is being said about the morality and quality of freedom.

1. The theology of freedom

We can confront the topic of freedom from many angles. The first angle is the moral one, from which man's freedom is to act without being hindered by various duties. The second angle is the psychological one, from which his freedom consists in being able to make decisions without being subjected to various influences¹. A third angle is the philosophical one, from which freedom is the inalienable right of man, as a rational being, to think and to act. It is also possible for all the other freedoms, social, personal, national, economic, and so forth, to be put into this framework.

Those aspects of freedom will not concern us, but we are going to examine freedom from one angle, that of theology. For we shall discover that it differs greatly from the other angles, in that it is more integrated.

It must be said from the start that independence, or freedom, is an essential constituent of man. When God created man, He gave him free will, which not even He Himself violates.

In Holy Scripture it says that man was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1,26). The holy Fathers have given various definitions as to just what this image is. Sometimes they refer it to man's sovereign dignity, to his superiority and his lordship over the terrestrial world, sometimes to his soul and body, sometimes to the whole

1. Encyclopedia of religion and ethics, vol. 5 p. 560 (Greek)

man, sometimes to the ruling part of his soul, which is the nous, sometimes to his independence². All these definitions show that the holy Fathers avoid specifying one particular point which is the image, but they rather describe all the functions which express the image. In any case it is a fact that one interpretation of the image also refers to independence, which interests us here.

John of Damaskos' interpretation concerning the image is characteristic. He says that God formed the body from the earth and "by His own inbreathing gave him a rational and noetic soul, which last we say is the divine image". Extending this interpretation he says: "for 'in His image' means the nous and free will, while 'in His likeness' means such likeness in virtue as is possible"³. Thus 'in the image' refers chiefly to the noetic and independent. In what is to be said below we shall mostly interpret independence, freedom, because there are many misinterpretations on this subject. We shall emphasise some essential points.

a) The relativity of human freedom

Man as a creature, as created by God, has absolute freedom within its relativity. With his freedom he can even turn against his creator, but this freedom is relative. This is because man is not uncreated, but created, which means that he was created by God and therefore has a beginning.

Archimandrite Sophrony observes: "Absolute freedom means being able to determine one's being on all levels,

2. Vladimir Lossky: *The mystical theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 115

3. John of Damaskos: *The Orthodox Faith*. Bk 2, Ch. 12, p. 235

independently, without constraint or limit in any form. This is the freedom of God - man does not have it", for he has not the authority to create "out of nought".

The ultimate temptation for the freedom of man (and in general of subsistent spirits) "is to fashion his own being, determine himself in all things, become a god himself, and not just take what is given, because that would entail a feeling of dependence"⁴.

Thus man does not have absolute freedom by his biological birth. But he can acquire absolute freedom by his rebirth and experiencing Christ's life, as we shall explain in the next section.

b) The challenge of freedom

The preceding also leads us to another parallel conclusion, that what is given to man by his existence is a challenge for freedom. True freedom is not just the choice of an event, but the possibility of a self-determined existence.

It has been observed very correctly that: "The ultimate challenge to the freedom of the person is the 'necessity' of existence. The moral sense of freedom, to which Western philosophy has accustomed us, is satisfied with the simple power of choice: a man is free who is able to choose one of the possibilities set before him. But this 'freedom' is already bound by the 'necessity' of these possibilities, and the ultimate and most binding of these 'necessities' for man is his existence itself: How can a man be considered absolutely free when he cannot do other than accept his existence?" Therefore man "as a created being cannot escape the 'necessity' of his existence"⁵.

4. Archimandrite Sophrony: Saint Silouan the Athonite, p. 109f

5. John Zizioulas: Being as Communion, p. 42f

In this light we can interpret an agonising existential question of many contemporary young people: "Why did my parents give birth to me without asking me? Why should I come into existence without being asked?" To be sure, before someone came into existence there was no one to be asked, but in any case this is a question which shows that the greatest challenge for freedom is the fact of existence and the fact that therefore man has to do something in order to be given the possibility of determining a new birth for himself.

Incidentally it should be pointed out that in the opinion of some, the embryo in its mother's womb is asked if it wishes to come to life. And the miscarriage of many embryos is interpreted as their refusal to be born. Thus in a way their existential freedom is preserved. We cannot judge this view from the patristic point of view, because the holy Fathers have not expressed themselves on this matter, at least as far as I know.

c) Freedom and fall

The freedom of man before the fall somehow worked differently from that which works today. Freedom as we know it in the period after the fall, after the victory of sin and the passions, after the illness which came into the whole human race as a consequence of Adam's sin, after the decay of communities and institutions, is receiving dreadful effects and it requires great pains in order to express it in a positive way. In the life before the fall there was the possibility of positive or negative response to the will of God, but that was different from freedom as we live it today. In other words, today we suffer terrible pressures and effects, and therefore it is with great labour and struggle that we

make decisions about doing something, while in man's original life this labour and struggle did not exist.

We should further point out that man's freedom even to sin and to withdraw from his Creator was a sign not of perfection but of imperfection. For his vacillation about what to do, instead of being stimulated by love and freedom towards the purpose of creation, the lack of impetus in man towards his archetype, shows a weakness and imperfection. Man should naturally be led towards the good. St. Maximos the Confessor, interpreting the request of Christ's prayer "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" says that he who impels his rational power towards God and worships him mystically becomes a participant in the angels' worship of God. In this case the words of the Apostle Paul apply: "For our citizenship is in heaven". Among these men desire does not sap their powers through sensual pleasure, "but there is only the intelligence naturally leading intelligent beings towards the source of intelligence, the Logos Himself"⁶. The perfection of man's freedom lies in his turning naturally towards his archetype.

d) Natural will and will based on opinion

While speaking of man's independence, I think that something must also be said about Christ's independence. St. John of Damaskos speaks "about the wills and independence of our Lord Jesus Christ". It is the subject of a dogma which shows us true freedom, how the two wills in Christ work and also how the saints too, who are united with Christ, can experience true freedom.

6. On the Lord's Prayer. Philokalia vol. 2, p. 298

There is a difference between 'willing' and 'how one wills'. To will is a work of nature, just as seeing is, since in all men there is willing. However, 'how one wills' is not of nature, "but of our opinion", just as how to see well or badly is also a matter of the particular opinion and freedom of each man. The "willing" is called will and "natural will", "how one wills" which is subject to the will, is called "will based on opinion"⁷.

Through His incarnation Christ assumed human nature, wholly without sin. Thus in His hypostasis the divine was united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly with human nature. Since Christ had two natures, therefore "we say that his natural wills and natural energies were two". But since the hypostasis is one, therefore "also we call one and the same both his willing and his doing". And Christ wills and acts not in a divided way but in unison; for He wills and "each form acts in communion with the other"⁸. It is one who acts, but in any case He has two natural energies and wills which do not act separately, but each single energy works in communion with the other. In any case "we call the wills and the actions natural and not hypostatic"⁹.

We have said that in each person there is the natural will and the will based on opinion. Christ had two natural wills, which worked "in communion with each other", but he did not have a will based on opinion. The will based on opinion is that of option, which is expressed after judgement, thought, dissent and decision. There was none of this in Christ. Therefore St. John of Damaskos says characteristically: "It is impossible to speak of opinion and

7. John of Damaskos: *The Orthodox Faith*. Bk. 3, ch. 14, p. 297f

8. *Ibid.* p. 296

9. *Ibid.* p. 297

option in Christ, if we want to speak literally". Opinion is a fruit and result of seeking and will and judgement about the unknown. After the opinion is formed, the option prefers one or the other. But Christ was not simply a man, but also God who knew everything, and therefore "he was unhesitating in thought and seeking and will and judgement, and naturally he was at home with the good, and evil was alien". Christ's will was naturally guided to doing good and to withdrawal from evil. This is why as God He never sinned, nor did He have any possibility to sin¹⁰. What the human will desired did come about in the Person of Christ "not in contradiction of opinion but in identity of natures". This means that "He wished these things naturally, at the time when His divine will wished and allowed the flesh to suffer and do the same things"¹¹. Thus in Christ there was not dissent, wavering, inner conflict when there was something to be done.

Christ, being God and man, naturally had "a will", but He did not have the will based on opinion, as we said before. His human will "yielded and submitted to His divine will without being moved by his own opinion, but willing those things which his divine will wanted it to will"¹².

Each will of Christ, both the divine and the human, willed and moved independently. For in every intelligent nature there is independence. How was it possible to have intelligence and not to have independence? So Christ's soul "was independent in his willing and wanted to moved independently", "but wanted those things independently which His divine will wanted it to will". Thus the two wills

10. Ibid. p. 302

11. Ibid. p. 298

12. Ibid. Bk. 3, ch. 18, p. 319

in Christ differed not in opinion, but in natural power: the divine will was without beginning, accomplishing all things, therefore having power and dispassion; His human will began in time, suffered natural and blameless passions and, while naturally it was not all-powerful, still, since it had been assumed truly and naturally by God the Word, that is why He was all-powerful¹³.

All these things indicate that since in Christ there were two natures there were also two wills. Likewise his independence, which is closely connected with his human nature, acted naturally towards the good, following the divine will.

e) The freedom of the saints

What has been said is needed in order for us to understand the limits of human freedom and also to understand how freedom, independence functions in the saints. As we shall see in what follows, the saint's independent will, precisely because he is favoured with divine grace, always moves naturally towards the good. When I speak of a saint I mean the deified person who partakes of God's deifying energy.

The Apostle Paul offers this witness: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2,11). He has the certainty that Christ lives in him, and so elsewhere too he says: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11,1). St. Gregory Palamas, bearer of the same Revelation, interpreting this teaching of the Apostle, says: "Do you see clearly that grace is uncreated? Not only is such grace uncreated, but also the result of this sort of energy of God is un-

13. Ibid. p. 321

created; and the great Paul, no longer living the temporal life but the divine and eternal life of the indwelling word, came to be without beginning and without end by grace". And a little further on: "Paul was a created being until he lived the life which had come about by God's command; then he no longer lived this life but a life which had become indwelt by God, become uncreated by grace: and wholly possessing only the living and acting word of God"¹⁴.

In the Apostle's words and in the interpretation by St. Gregory Palamas, champion of the theologians, it is clear that a man who has been united with Christ, who has attained illumination and deification, by grace becomes uncreated and without beginning, because he has the living Christ within him.

And St. Maximos the Confessor, interpreting the words of the Apostle Paul that Melchizedek, who is a type of Christ, was "without father, without mother, without genealogy" (Heb. 7,3), writes: "The person who has mortified the earthly aspects of himself, thoroughly extinguishing the will of the flesh within him and repudiating the attachment to it which splits asunder the love we owe to God alone; who has disowned all the modalities of the flesh and the world for the sake of divine grace... - such a person has become, like Melchizedek, 'without father, without mother, without descent'. For because of the union with the Spirit that has taken place within him he cannot now be dominated by flesh or by nature"¹⁵.

Every Christian, when he is united with Christ, is dei-

14. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain: Interpretation of the 14 Epistles of the Apostle Paul, vol. 2, p. 156, note 1 (Gk)

15. Philokalia 2, p. 278, 75

fied, sanctified, and his whole being, and somehow also his freedom, which is always subject to God's will, is shown favour. In this sense we say that by His incarnation He granted us freedom. He freed us from sin, death and the devil and we enjoy this freedom in our spiritual rebirth. Nicholas Kavalas says characteristically: "It was when He mounted the cross and died and rose again that the freedom of mankind came about, that the form and the beauty were created and the new members were prepared"¹⁶.

We have already seen that the challenge for freedom is the given fact of existence, and this creates an existential problem. But by rebirth in Christ, which takes place within the Church, the people overcome this existential problem. Just as great as the difference between biological birth and spiritual birth is the difference between the struggle over the fact of existence and the possibility of self-determination of the new existence. Man is born spiritually by his own will. This spiritual birth has great meaning and importance. St. Gregory the Theologian speaks of three births. The first is the biological birth from the parents, the second is through the mysteries of holy Baptism, the father of which is God, and the third is through tears, and the father of this birth is the man himself¹⁷. To express ourselves through St. Maximos the Confessor, by the first birth we come into being, by the second into "well being" and by the third, which is identical with resurrection, into "ever well being"¹⁸.

Thus man is called to this new life, and if he responds, he is born into "ever well being", overcoming the provo-

16. Nicholas Kavalas: *The life in Christ*. Bk. 2,8. SVS p. 78

17. PG 37, 1498-1499

18. PG 91, 1325 BC

cation and temptation given in his existence. And since the deified person becomes "uncreated", "without beginning" and "without genealogy" - by the grace of God - for this reason he acquires a freedom which is absolute within human limits and facts. Since his freedom has an impulse towards God through love, there is no ambivalence in him, his independence functions naturally and so he becomes perfect by grace, since he has abandoned the imperfection of his nature, which is indicated by the battle for single-mindedness.

St. Symeon the New Theologian says that our self-determination, our free will, is not removed by Baptism, "but it grants us freedom no longer to be held against our will in the devil's tyranny". Baptism grants man the freedom not to be tyrannised by his desire, by the devil. After Baptism it again depends on us whether we remain self-willed towards God's commandments or we depart from this way and go back to the devil through his cunning practices¹⁹.

St. Diadochos of Photike, referring to the desire for self-determination, says that independence is a desire of the rational soul, which moves readily "towards whatever it desires". Therefore he urges us to persuade it to move only towards the good²⁰. When it is moving towards the good, it is fulfilling its purpose and moving naturally.

The same saint writes that all men are formed in the image of God. "But to be in His likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God". "Only when we do not belong to ourselves do we become like Him who through

19. Practical chapters, 3, 89. CS41, p. 99f

20. Philokalia vol. 1, p. 254

love has reconciled us to Himself"²¹. From these words of the saint it can be seen that the likeness belongs to the saints who have mortified their passions and subjected their freedom to God through love. He emphasises the subjection of freedom to God, but this comes about through love. For in fact it is only then that freedom moves and functions naturally.

It can be added that "the only exercise of freedom, in an ontological manner, is love". True freedom cannot be expressed without love; it loses its ontological content. And this means "that personhood creates the following dilemma for human existence: either freedom as love, or freedom as negation"²².

In the saints we encounter the co-existence of love and freedom. They love God really, I could say ecstatically, and therefore their freedom, having been released from different admixtures and ailments, is directed towards God, it moves naturally. And in this way the saints are true men, what we have usually called persons.

Since, however, I do not wish to take my stand on a philosophical and theological level, which may seem abstract - although I do not think it is, for the theological position is necessary - I shall go on to present some expressions of freedom, as it is experienced in the ascetic life of the Church. One is man's freedom from death, another is the freedom of the nous from logic and the senses, and the third is man's freedom from the environment. These topics will reveal clearly the great value of freedom, as the members of our Church experience it.

21. *Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 253

22. John Zizioulas: *Being as Communion*, p. 46

2. Freedom from death

It can be seen clearly in the whole Biblico-patristic tradition that death is a fruit and result of man's withdrawal from God and that the life in Christ is a transcending of death. Death came about through man's freedom and self-will, and through life in the Church he can attain freedom from death. I should like to develop the subject of death in the light of two great Fathers of the Church, St. John of Damaskos and St. Gregory Palamas, who wrote down and systematised the whole teaching of the earlier saints.

a) Independence and death, according to St. John of Damaskos

According to St. John of Damascos, man's freedom, with which he was endowed by God, gave him the ability to commit sin or not. He writes that God made man "by nature sinless and endowed with freedom of will". When he says that God made man sinless, he does not mean that he was not open to sin, because only the divine is not open to sin, but that "it is not in his nature to sin, but rather in his power of choice". This means that man had the power to persevere and progress in the good, with the help of divine grace, as well as having the power to turn from virtue and fall into vice, "God permitting it because of man's free will"²³.

Thus man's nature was sinless immediately after his creation, but his will was free, he had the power to remain good and the power to withdraw from God. This is why death came as a result of the misuse of freedom, because

23. *The Orthodox Faith*, Book 2, ch. 12. FC37, p. 235f

man disobeyed God's will. So man was created with the possibility of remaining immortal or of dying. And this depended on the right or wrong use of his freedom.

This freedom was related to reason. St. John of Damascus, explaining why he was created with free will, says: "The freedom of the will is directly connected with the reason". And everything that is created is also changeable. Being brought from nonbeing to being is a change, and so is being made into something else from an existing material. Now, inanimate things and brute beasts are changed by corporeal alterations, whereas rational beings are changed by deliberate choice. Thus choice, will, selection, which is connected with reason, is necessarily a mark of the created being, which was created out of non-being. Everyone who thinks and elaborates his thought has the possibility of making a choice. Since free will is connected with reason, therefore "a being may be irrational or rational; but if it is rational, it will be the master of its actions and free". Irrational beings are not free, since, instead of leading nature, they are led by it. This is clear from the fact that they do not deny their natural appetite, but just as soon as they feel an appetite for something, they move to act. However, since man is rational, "he leads his nature rather than is led by it". And this is clear from the fact that he has freedom to resist the appetite or to obey it"²⁴.

Thus man has free will, since he is created and changeable, and this free will is connected with reason. Man committed sin and died, first spiritually and later physically; he became mortal and passible. This is connected with his freedom. God did not create man to die, but man died because he misused his freedom.

24. Bk. 2, chapter 27, p. 258

I would like next to look at the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas about death and the way in which it came into the world.

**b) The entrance of death
according to St. Gregory Palamas**

Citing the scriptural passage: "God did not make death, nor does He take pleasure in destroying the living" (Wisdom 1,13), St. Gregory Palamas writes that God not only did not create death, but neither is He the cause of the terrible things which followed death: diseases, illnesses and all the other evils. All the terrible things from which man suffers came from the sin which he committed by his free choice. He says: "It was through sin that we were clothed in garments of skin, this sickly and mortal and distressed body, and we have been deported to this temporary and destructible world and condemned to live a life of much suffering, full of disasters"²⁵. The garments of skin which we have been wearing, which are mortal and passible, are a result of sin, which came about through our own choice and freedom.

God not only did not create death, but he hindered its coming into the world. Since man had free will and God did not want to abolish his free will - this would mean a disaster - therefore as soon as He had created him and given him life, He gave him an immortalising piece of advice. The advice not to eat of the forbidden fruit is called a life-giving commandment, because it would lead man to life and would keep him from going towards death. He did not give this commandment imperatively, "but forewarned

25. Gregory Palamas. Homily 31, 1. EPE 10, p. 276-278

him of what would happen if it was not obeyed". And He gave the commandment that on the day when they should eat they would die, so that they might take care not to transgress and thus avoid "meeting with death"²⁶.

In speaking about the death which man would meet if he transgressed His commandment, God meant both spiritual and physical death. But on the day of man's sin, spiritual death would come, and then physical death, because on the day when he tasted the forbidden fruit he did not die physically, but spiritually. Spiritual death is forsaking God, precisely as the absence of light creates darkness. When God is present, it is impossible for man to experience death. St. Gregory Palamas writes: "When God, Who is life itself and the life of all the living, especially of those living a godly life, is present to our soul, it is impossible for death to be there as well". Thus, death comes to our soul "not from God, but because of our abandonment of God, which is sin"²⁷. It is clear from this teaching that the cause of death is sin and, naturally, sin is linked with free will, with man's ability to sin or to keep God's commandment, to remain in God or to abandon God, where the true enhypostatic life is.

c) Sin and death

From all that we have said so far we can see that death came from sin, but it has to be added that sin also reigns in death. That is to say, sin and death are mutually interdependent. The Apostle Paul writes: "so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness

26. Ibid. p. 270-280

27. Ibid. p. 280

to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5, 21). And in another place the same Apostle advises: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom. 6, 12). And again the same Apostle says characteristically: "the sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15, 56).

In these apostolic passages sin is linked with death and it is said that sin is the sting of death, just as sin also reigns in death and in the mortal body. Thus the whole world of the senses, of mortality and the imagination is a prison which tyrannises man. Man cries out for freedom and for individual rights, but in reality he is a prisoner of decay and death. The Apostle Paul expresses this fact in all its tragic character: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my nous, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7, 23-24).

I think it would be interesting to look a little more broadly at how sin reigns in death, how sin and man's wretchedness come from mortality and corruptibility through his way of living death. For the sense of death and the certainty of it lead man to commit sins. And we can say with certainty that the way of living and the sense of death are a source of many troubles, both personal and social.

Because of death and the uncertainty of it, but also because of the variety of its consequences, which are illnesses and all the other sufferings, man is possessed of fear and anguish and in general of the instinct of self-preservation²⁸. The effort of self-preservation develops selfishness,

28. See broader analysis in J. Romanides: *The ancestral sin*. Athens 1989, p. 162-163 (Gk)

whereby man breaks the bonds of love, in fact abandons unselfish love and takes on love of self. He does all these things in the climate of self-love and vanity. Thus many passions develop, such as self-protection, egoism, hatred, jealousy and so many other things.

Therefore riches, private property, injustices, the lack of true love, murder and so many other evils, which are also a source of many other troubles, come from the experience of death.

Because death reigns in him and he sees his mortality in all its "majesty" and sees the sin that is bound up with this mortality and considers his life to be meaningless, therefore he tries in every way to persuade others that he is worthy. Many evils come from this. "He loves adulation and fears insults. He seeks his own and is jealous of others' successes. He loves those who love him and hates those who hate him. He looks for safety and prosperity in wealth, praise, and bodily pleasures, or perhaps he imagines that he is destined for a personally blessed and placid enjoyment of the presence of God, unrelated to any expression of genuine and active love for others. Because of his anguish and fear, man becomes an individualist. And when he also identifies himself with some ideology of common ownership (not monastic-ascetic) he is again moved by individualistic selfishness, because he mistakenly sees his desire for self-satisfaction and happiness as his true destination. It may even be that some general ideological principles about love for mankind fire him with enthusiasm in some undefined way, in spite of the fact that a deadly hatred for his neighbour is lurking in his heart. These are the works of the 'flesh' which is under the power of death and satan"²⁹.

29. John Romanides: *op. cit.* p. 163

Interpreting the apostolic passage: "and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2,15), St. John Chrysostom says "he who fears death is a slave, and submits to all things rather than die"³⁰. A man who is under the influence of death is a slave of sin, of the devil, and of death itself. He is also a slave of the passions and does everything in order to avoid dying, to prolong his life on earth. Referring to the people before Christ's resurrection, Chrysostom writes characteristically: "ever expecting that they should die, and being afraid of death, could have no sense of pleasure while this fear was present with them"³¹.

The life of the man who is under the threat of death and the law of sin becomes unbearable and tiresome, it becomes a life without meaning and purpose. Man was formed with the possibility of remaining immortal and of living eternally with God. But through sin he lost this calling, with the result that he suffered a terrible experience, that of being sheathed in mortality and corruptibility. Because he knows that the purpose of his creation was different, he becomes unbearable, unsatisfied, hard to manage. He is not satisfied with anything, not pleased by anything, not content with anything good whatsoever. He can enjoy all the material goods, yet without overcoming death he is a tragic man. This is the explanation of why he is constantly possessed by a grievance. The man who is a slave of death has no freedom at all, he is a tragic being, a continually unsatisfied man. The theatre, literature, philosophy and other such things are a small respite in the tragedy of his life. So education, psychology, philosophy, the human ac-

30. John Chrysostom: Homily 4 on Hebrews. NPNF vol. 14, p. 385

31. Ibid.

tivities in general, cannot effectively help him or develop him fully.

In the tragedy of this situation man tries to forget death. This too is a way of escape from the reality and tragic nature of death. But it increases the problem and the tragedy. By repressing and forgetting death man is led to a sensual life, to consumption and a way of living which consists only of material enjoyment. "Autonomised consumption as a basic content of life, corresponds opportunely with man's need to possess, to have sensual pleasure and to forget his death"³². This way of life, which is called the culture of consumption, "this vague and illusory 'science' (which certainly has no connection with study and research) solves all the metaphysical problems of the average man, it answers all his questions, and presents death either as a physiological end to biological existence and a plunge into non-existence, or, finally, as the last obstacle to the advance of science, which also cannot but be conquered some day"³³.

d) Transcending death

The dreadful results of death and its tragic nature are transcended by Christ's resurrection and the ecclesiastical life in general Church. As long as sin is the sting of death, it means that when sin is abolished, death too is abolished within the personal life, and so a man in this life enjoys immortality. For immortality is not simply the natural condition of the soul, it is not the life beyond the tomb, but the transcending of death through the life in Christ.

32. Chr. Yannaras: *The neo-Hellenic identity*. Ed. Grigori, Athens 1978, p. 17-18 (in Greek)

33. *Ibid.* p. 18-19

The Apostle Paul, who speaks of sin as the sting of death, writes: "when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin' (1 Cor. 15, 54-56).

The interpretation given by St. John Chrysostom is characteristic. He says that not only has death been abolished by Christ's Resurrection, but the power of the devil has been destroyed. "Do you see that in casting out the tyranny of death, he also overthrew the strength of the devil?"³⁴. After Christ's Resurrection death "is no longer terrible, but has been trodden under foot, has been utterly despised; it is vile and of no account"³⁵. Therefore anyone who lives the life in Christ "fears no one, he is in terror of no one, he is higher than all, and more free than all"³⁶. Therefore true freedom is the transcending of death, it is freedom from death and sin.

The person who lives in the Church by the sacramental and ascetic life is rejecting the sting of death, which is sin. If we think of how in the whole patristic tradition it seems that sin is darkening of the nous, and from this darkening the passions are created, then freedom from death and from sin is the illumination of the nous. This means that man first goes through the stage of purification, casts out of his heart all evil thoughts, rids himself of pleasure and pain, then experiences illumination of his nous. And then he lives a truly free life which transcends death. The Christian's

34. Homily 4 on Hebrews. NPNF vol. 14, p. 385

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

whole ascetic effort consists in this, and this is the aim of the sacraments and asceticism.

The Christian in the Church first experiences mindfulness of death. Not only does he not seek to forget death and to thrust it into the unconscious, not only does he deny the reality and tragic character of death, but he has it constantly in his mind and in this way acquires a naturalness, because the sense of mortality and decay is truthfulness.

Mindfulness of death, which is the beginning of man's freedom from its tragic character, is meant in two senses.

The first is mindfulness of mortality and the certainty of the end of biological life. This mindfulness, combined with the existence of the soul after death, the partial crisis after the soul's departure, and the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming of Christ for the whole man to be judged, creates terror and fear. Man reflects upon the sin and passions which possess his soul, he recalls what Christ and the Apostles taught about the life of sinners, of the unrepentant, and he is possessed with fear and terror. It is the fear and terror of the entry into the spiritual life. This fear, increased by and connected with hope in the love of God and the sense of the Church as a Hospital leads him to a cure and to love, which "casts out fear" (1 John 4, 18). Thus there is the fear of the entry, aroused by the Judgment to come and the reality of Hell, and the fear of the perfect, which is connected with the sense of God's love. In this second category man fears sin because he realises that it leads him far from God and creates in him the sense of Hell.

A second interpretation of the recollection of death is the charismatic state of remembering death. Through the removal of divine grace, man falls into despair and godly hopelessness. Just as Adam's sin had consequences for the

whole of creation, so also man's sin, that is to say the darkness of the nous, has cosmological consequences. He himself feels that he is dead to God and, indeed, he sees the whole world as dead, dying. Nothing offers him joy, peace and happiness. Everything is dead. In this way he understands existentially that he is a microcosm within the macrocosm, a summing up of the whole creation. Since the grace of God comes to the heart and is conveyed through it to the body and to the whole cosmos, and the loss of the grace of God has disastrous effects on the whole world, this means that man is the summing up of creation.

It can be said that the sin which we commit is worse than Adam's sin. St. Gregory Palamas says that many people blame Adam because by following the advice of the devil he disobeyed the advice of God "and thereby brought about our death". But, he says, it is not the same to want to taste a deadly plant before knowing its destructive effects, as it is to taste this deadly poison when we know its dreadful consequences from experience. It is the same with our own sin in relation to Adam's sin. Adam sinned without knowing through experience exactly what sin was and what were its dreadful results, whereas each of us commits sin, having this experience. Therefore St. Gregory Palamas says: "Each of us is more worthy of blame and criticism than Adam"³⁷.

Mindfulness of death, either as an experience of mortality or as a sense of the loss of the divine life, is a spiritual gift, and therefore an experience of transcending death and of our freedom from its tyranny. For this experience even with the two forms is not independent of the grace of God. It is only through the inspiration of the grace of God

37. Gregory Palamas: Homily 31,5

that man can experience such states and only in this way that he can free himself from the tragedy of death. This is why ways of life which embrace mindfulness of death, lives which are "death-centred" are natural and true, they mark the natural boundaries of man's life. Through the sense of mortality a man becomes more social and transforms his personal relationships.

St. Philotheos of Sinai writes that mindfulness of death embraces many virtues. "Mindfulness of death begets grief; it promotes the exercise of self-control in all things; it is a reminder of hell; it is the mother of prayer and tears; it induces guarding of the heart and detachment from material things; it is a source of attentiveness and discretion. These in their turn produce the twofold fear of God. In addition, the purging of impassioned thoughts from the heart embraces many of the Lord's commandments"³⁸.

Liberation from death is brought about by life in Christ, when the person feels an inalienable peace in his heart, a love for all men, and even for his enemies, release from every tyranny which created things wish to impose, uninterrupted mindfulness of God.

I should like for us to look next at some particular characteristic signs which manifest the transcendence of death, man's liberation from its dreadful tyranny.

The first is that the person is not afraid of death and the time of death. Not only is he not possessed by the fear of death, but he is also looking forward to it. Of course this anticipation is not from the point of view that he is waiting for his soul's release and freedom from his body, as the Platonic philosophers taught, but for the possibility of meeting Christ and being liberated from the change and

38. *Philokalia*, vol. 3, p. 30, 38

deterioration which constitute the biological life. I may add that he rejoices as the hour approaches. This is expressed by the Apostle Paul: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1,21-24).

The second is foreknowledge of death. There are many saints, old and new, who have been granted by God to see the hour of their death and to prepare themselves for it. They have seen it and waited for it in joy.

The third is the confronting of death when it comes. Athanasios the Great describes the blissful end of St. Antony the Great. After talking with those present, and kissing them, "he lifted up his feet; and with a look as though friends had come to him and he was overjoyed at the sight of them - for, as he lay there, his face had a cheerful look - he passed away and was gathered to his fathers"³⁹.

The fourth is the glory of the man who has overcome sin and death by the time of his departure from this life. A characteristic example is that of Sisoës the Great. When he was at the point of death, while many fathers were with him, "his face shone like the sun". Then he said: "Look, Abba Anthony is coming". A little later he said, "Look, the choir of prophets is coming. "And again his face shone more brightly... A little later he said: "Look, the choir of apostles is coming", and the brightness in his face redoubled. Then those present, seeing that he was speaking with someone, asked him to tell them with whom he was speaking. He replied: "The angels have come to fetch me, and I

39. Athanasios the Great: *Life of Antony*. NPNF vol. 4, p. 220

am begging them to let me do a little penance". And when the fathers told him that he had no need for penance, he replied: "Truly, I do not think that I have even made a beginning yet". With that the Fathers understood "that he was perfect". Then at once his face became like the sun. And he said to those present: "Look, the Lord is coming and He is saying: "Bring me the vessel from the desert". And at once he gave up his spirit. "Then there was a flash of lightning and all the house was filled with a sweet odour"⁴⁰.

The fifth characteristic sign of the gift of a blessed death is the martyrdom of a saint. Death through martyrdom is really a gift of grace, because it is not a matter of will power, but an experience of deification, which is a clear indication of the transcendence of death. In fact martyrdom is a fruit of seeing God, an indication that the Christian has been united with Christ and received a martyr's grace. This means that the experience of deification transforms the soul and body. But martyrdom is a gift of a blessed death and a sign of transcendence of death, according to a theological explanation given by St. Gregory Palamas.

Speaking of the Worthy Forerunner, and especially of his beheading, he writes that the Baptist of Christ "did not need to undergo natural death". It was not necessary to undergo a natural death, because death is a result of Adam's transgression. But the Worthy Forerunner is not a debtor, because he is a servant of the commandment and subject to God from his mother's womb. The saints generally give their lives for virtue and devotion "and for this reason a violent death is more suitable for them than a good death". That is why Christ died in this way⁴¹. As long as the sting

40. Sayings of the Desert Fathers. Mowbrays, London 1975, p. 180,14.

41. Gregory Palamas: Homily 40,26

of death, which is sin, is set aside in the saints, the most natural way of departure from this life is through martyrdom, a violent death.

The saints inspired by the grace of God were freed from the reign of death. This is not an imaginary thing, but a reality, for it is related to man's freedom from sin and the liberation of the nous from reasoning, the senses and the imagination.

3. The freedom of the nous

Freedom from death and from sin is very closely connected with the freedom of the nous from sin. Freedom is used in this sense in the New Testament, especially in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. Let us look at two characteristic passages.

a) Freedom and nous

The first passage is: "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6,18-22).

Here for the Apostle Paul slavery is linked with slavery to the passions and to the deeds of the flesh, the end of which is death, while freedom is linked with man's purity from the passions, with holiness, and the end of this freedom is eternal life. In the teaching of the Apostle Paul freedom is in reality the freedom of the nous from attack by the passions, and this brings about illumination of the nous.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, interpreting this passage, says: "There are three freedoms according to Koresios: Freedom of nature, the freedom of grace and the freedom of glory and beatitude. Freedom of nature is contrary to force and to the tendency toward a single good and makes one independent. Freedom of grace is opposed to sin and the passions and makes one righteous and holy. And the freedom of glory is opposed to death and to the temptations of the present life and makes one blessed; this is the Apostle's word concerning freedom and grace"⁴². So it concerns freedom of the nous.

The second passage of the Apostle Paul is: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8,2). If one links this passage with all the other passages in the same chapter, one will discover that it is a question of the liberation of the nous from the passions and reason, and of illumination of the nous. Thus the same chapter speaks about the carnal mind, which is death, and the mind of the Spirit, which is life and peace (Rom. 8,6); about the Spirit of God, which dwells in man and makes him a son of God (Rom. 8,14-16); about noetic prayer which takes place by the Holy Spirit in the heart, "by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"

42. Nikodemos the Hagiorite: Interpretation of the 14 Epistles of the Apostle Paul, Vol. 1, Thessaloniki 1989. p. 154, note 159.

(Rom. 8,15); about the fact that the Holy Spirit prays within us: "but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8,26). Therefore in reality freedom is the freedom of the nous from the passions, and this is what constitutes illumination of the nous.

This is the framework in which the holy Fathers too interpret the relative passages of the Apostle Paul. According to St. Gregory of Sinai, just as the law of the letter is that which acts in the flesh, so the law of the Spirit is the law of life, "working and speaking in the heart". And while the law of the letter "imperceptibly turns a man into a pharisee", the law of the spirit "frees the nous from the law of sin and death"⁴³. And Niketas Stethatos says that he who cures the passions by the opposite virtues converts the mundane will into "the law of the spirit of life" and makes it free⁴⁴.

So freedom of the nous is illumination of the nous, which is the second stage of the spiritual life and follows the stage of purification. A man first purifies his heart and then his nous is freed and illuminated, after having previously been identified with reason, passions and the environment and in bondage to them.

Here I shall not go into precisely what the nous is according to the Orthodox tradition and the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church. I did this in another of my books. It should be emphasised here that the nous is the eye of the soul, the purest part of the soul, the energy of the soul which acquires experience of the life of God. It is distinguished from reason in that reason investigates cre-

43. Philokalia vol. 4, p. 215, 19

44. Philokalia 4, p. 82,13

ated things and acquires knowledge of created truth, while the nous acquires experience of God and acquires knowledge of uncreated things. The experience of the nous is given expression by reason.

I should like only to point out the teaching of St. John of Damaskos on this subject. When he says that the nous is the purest part of the soul, and that "as the eye is to the body, so is the nous to the soul"⁴⁵, he is making a distinction between the nous and reason. Man is rational. There are three powers which make up man's soul: those of reason, desire and anger. He writes characteristically: those of reason are the theoretikon and the praktikon, the theoretikon being the understanding, as it has the things that are, and the praktikon is the desiring, which defines the right word for actions. And they call the theoretikon nous and the praktikon word, and the theoretikon wisdom and the praktikon prudence"⁴⁶. Thus the nous is the theoretikon of the rational part of the soul, which understands beings and possesses wisdom, while reason is the practical part of the soul which elaborates thoughts and defines the right reason in practical things.

Therefore a natural man is one whose nous and reason move in parallel according to their predestination. When the nous is identified with reason, a number of problems are created. Therefore the primary work of orthodox life and orthodox asceticism lies in the effort of the nous to be freed from its slavery to all the created things and to be left free to attain the wisdom of God. In what follows we shall speak of the liberation of the nous, which I think is one of the most fundamental tasks of orthodox theology,

45. John of Damaskos: *The Orthodox Faith* Bk. 2, ch. 12. FC 37, p. 236

46. *Ibid.* Bk. 2, ch. 27. FC p. 258

in the teaching of Isaiah the Solitary. The account in the works of the so-called neptic Fathers on this subject is very significant. For the saints, through long experience and years of struggle over these matters, gained knowledge of themselves and consequently acquired a very deep knowledge of man. They know what man is, what are his depths, how he is enslaved and how he is freed from this slavery. What we shall hear from Isaiah the solitary is not conjecture and philosophy, but experiential theology.

**b) Freedom of the nous,
according to Abba Isaiah the solitary**

1) The title of the chapters which we are going to examine is very characteristic: "On guarding the nous". These chapters speak of the nous, the heart and the conscience. While it seems that these three concepts are different from one another, there is unity among them as well. The nous which is diffused through the senses into the surroundings should return to the heart. The nous is united with the heart by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. When the nous returns to the heart from its diffusion, it dwells within it and sheds grace on the heart. Then the heart becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit and the nous becomes king and world-ruler of the passions. It is then that the conscience is functioning normally. It has a pure word and its voice is the voice of God. For in the Orthodox Tradition when we speak of conscience we do not mean an abstract voice, we do not mean it in the philosophical and ethical sense of the term, but as the voice of God which is heard in the pure heart. And the purer the heart, the more purely the voice of God is heard. Therefore the keeping of the nous, the keeping of the heart and the keeping of the conscience are

one. So in what follows, what is said about the heart relates to the conscience as well, what is said about the conscience relates to the heart as well, and what is said about the nous relates to the heart and the conscience.

2) In his chapters Abba Isaiah the Solitary speaks of the darkening of the nous. When the nous is withdrawn from God and loses God's grace, it is darkened and blinded. The passions darken man's nous. When a person does not struggle to free himself from the action of the passions, he cannot make progress with God. "As a result the nous is always shrouded in darkness and cannot advance in holiness, because it does not make the effort to uproot these thoughts by means of spiritual knowledge"⁴⁷.

The nous is disturbed by thoughts. Thoughts create great agitation in the inner world of man, but particularly in the nous, "troubling it with distractions and making it lazy"⁴⁸. When the nous is distracted and lazy it becomes predisposed to being captured and darkened. In the patristic tradition the nous should always be alert and ready.

The nous is the nourisher of the heart, just as the eye is the nourisher of reason. If the nous is healthy, then the heart is also healthy, but if the nous is ill, then the heart too is ill. The heart of man is nourished well or badly by the nous. The darkened nous which is distracted and lazy corrupts the heart. "If some shameful thought is sown in your heart as you are sitting in your cell, watch out. Resist the evil..."⁴⁹.

Impurity of the heart, all the passions which are sown by the nous, have dreadful consequences for man. The conscience disturbs, reproaches and accuses. In so far as a

47. *Philokalia* 1, p. 25,13

48. *Ibid*, p. 24,12

49. *Ibid*, p. 28,27

man is reproached by his conscience, he is not free. Freedom is experienced chiefly in the core of man's being. Abba Isaiah is expressive: "So long as your conscience reproves you for anything that you have done contrary to nature, you are not yet free: the reproof means that you are still under trial and have not yet been acquitted"⁵⁰. We all have experience of these reproaches and accusations of our conscience, which deprive us of freedom. It is not unrelated to the darkening of the nous and impurity of the heart.

3) This is just why freedom of the nous is demanded. If all the evils originate from darkening and enslavement of the nous, this means that effort must be directed to liberating the nous from the influence of reason, the passions, the senses and the surroundings. Abba Isaiah uses three statements to show the effects of liberating the nous. The first statement is that if the nous is freed "from all hope in things visible, this is a sign that sin has died in you"⁵¹. If the nous is not freed from its slavery to things visible, then sin cannot die in us. Thus we understand that purity of heart and mortification of sin in us is not unrelated to the freeing of the nous. The second statement of Abba Isaiah is that "if your nous is freed, the breach between it and God is eliminated"⁵². The darkening of the nous creates a great chasm between God and man. The freeing of the nous annihilates this chasm and the person acquires union with God. Man cannot acquire union with God in any other way than by the liberation of his nous. And the third statement is: "If your nous is freed from all its enemies and attains the Sabbath rest, it lives in another age, a new age in which it contemplates things new and undecaying"⁵³. Liberation

50. Ibid. p. 25,18

51. Ibid. p. 23,8

52. Ibid. p. 23,9

53. Ibid. p. 24,10

of the nous is related to the Sabbath rest, inner repose and peace. This results in the nous being caught up into the divine and, of course, the revelation of the mysteries of God. Thus, according to the degree of freedom of the nous, there is experience of the mortification of sin, communion with God and the revelation of the mysteries connected with the vision of God.

Furthermore, freedom of the nous from every visual image and every thought is what is called pure prayer and true worship of God. Then the person prays undistractedly and worships God truly. "What then is meant by the worship of God? It means that we have nothing extraneous in our nous when we are praying to Him..."⁵⁴. This is what we call unceasing, inner, noetic prayer of the heart, which takes place without our having any thought in our heart. The nous, which is the most refined attention, returns to the heart and prays to God unceasingly.

4) The entire ascetic effort of the Church lies in liberating the nous from reasoning and the passions. But we realise that this is not an easy matter, and the struggle is bloody and difficult. The holy Fathers are not content to speak of the liberation of the nous, but they go on to emphasise the methods which must be used to achieve this goal. In what follows we shall look at some of these ascetic methods, as Abba Isaiah the Solitary describes and analyses them.

In its effort to return to the heart after its dispersion the nous is helped by the anger which is connected with it. "There is among the passions an anger of the nous, and this anger is in accordance with nature"⁵⁵. Anger, in other words, is the nerves of the soul, but also of the nous, by

54. Ibid. p. 24,13

55. Ibid. p. 22,1

which it is kept pure. Therefore without anger "a man cannot attain purity"⁵⁶. Of course preparation is necessary in order for the anger according to nature to be activated. It is preceded by detachment, that is, death in relation to every person or thing, and this produces the desire for God. Then the desire for God gives rise to the anger that is in accordance with nature, and that flares up against all the tricks of the enemy". This anger in accordance with nature is followed by the fear of God, through which love is made manifest⁵⁷.

The nous is very easily taken prisoner by the passions and the senses. For thoughts are provoked by the devil. They stir up pleasure in a thing, with the ulterior aim that the nous should be taken prisoner. Thus, when the nous is captured, the way opens for committing sin. Therefore sobriety and attention are required in order for the nous not to be captured by thoughts, images and fantasies. For this purpose we must cultivate practical virtue. "Let us stand firm in the fear of God, rigorously practising the virtues and not giving our conscience cause to stumble. In the fear of God let us keep our attention fixed within ourselves"⁵⁸. When we speak of practising the virtues we mean obedience, undistractedness, renunciation, reasonable service, etc. The demons cunningly send various thoughts in order that "we will cease to guard our hearts, thinking that we have now attained peace". Then they make a sudden attack on our soul and master it. Therefore Abba Isaiah recommends: "Let us stand with fear of God and keep guard over our hearts, practising the virtues which check the wickedness of our enemies"⁵⁹. Today young people are usually

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid. p. 27,25

58. Ibid. p. 22,3

59. Ibid. p. 24,11

careless about the practice of the practical virtues, thinking that they are second-rate, and they busy themselves with the theoretical ones, like noetic prayer. We should realise that without action it is impossible for us to advance to the vision of God. If we disregard the practical virtues, especially obedience, repentance, fasting, charity, our nous cannot become free.

Connected with this is the submission of the will of the monk and in general of the Christian to the will of God. "If a monk submits his will to the law of God, then his intellect will govern in accordance with this law all that is subordinate to itself"⁶⁰. As long as we remain under our own will and do not submit to the will of God, the nous cannot govern the inner world of man. Submission of the nous to God and His will has great consequences. Then God helps and strengthens him. If God sees that the nous has entirely submitted to Him and puts its hope in Him alone, He strengthens it, saying: 'Have no fear, Jacob my son, my little Israel'"⁶¹. Only by the power of God can the nous become pure and return to its natural place, which is the heart. But God cannot help the person as long as he does not rely exclusively on Him. If the person keeps hopes in other directions as well and does not rest all his hope on God, He does not help him in his effort to gain his inner freedom.

When the nous grows strong through the grace of God and increasing love for God, "it struggles against what is contrary to nature, separates this from what is in accordance with nature"⁶². How can the nous make this struggle

60. Ibid. p. 28,26

61. Ibid. 23,4

62. Ibid. p. 28,19

without being strengthened and helped by God? We know that man is not an autonomous being, but made in an image, which means that Christ is his archetype and it is through Christ that he can fulfill the purpose of his creation. With boldness the nous can fight the enemy. This boldness, man's relationship with God, is very significant: "When the nous hears these words of reassurance, it says boldly to its enemies: 'Who would fight with me? Let him stand against me. And who would accuse me? Let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord is my helper; who will harm me?'⁶³. If a man receives no help when at war, he can feel no confidence when at peace⁶⁴.

By the power of the anger which is united with the nous, a person must expel from his heart every provocation of a thought. It is a teaching of the holy Fathers that whereas at first we need to watch the thoughts which are working in our mind, the main effort is not to allow the thoughts to enter our heart. Or if they have already entered the heart, we should make every effort to expel them from it. It is in this way that purity of heart is achieved. Abba Isaiah says: "At the time of prayer, we should expel from our heart the provocation of each evil thought, rebutting it in a spirit of devotion"⁶⁵.

The heart is being guarded when the nous stands at the gate of the heart and does not permit thoughts to enter it. In the orthodox asceticism of the Church this is called watchfulness. Abba Isaiah advises: "Stand guard, then, over your heart and keep a watch on your senses"⁶⁶. Both the heart and the senses need to be guarded. The nous must keep unharmed and pure not only the senses of the body,

63. Ibid. p. 23,5

64. Ibid. p. 25,16

65. Ibid. p. 27,26

66. Ibid. p. 24,12

but also the senses of the soul. For just as there are bodily senses, the soul too has senses. Thus when the nous keeps the senses free of carnal desires and acquires dispassion, then too, in the possible attack of the devil and the passions, if the nous "continually calls upon God in secret", God sends His help⁶⁷. This means that in order for God to help man in this struggle, man's free assent is required, and this cooperation is expressed by the effort of the nous to keep the heart and senses pure. Therefore "the monk should shut all the gates of his soul, that is, the senses, so that he is not lured astray by them"⁶⁸.

A person needs to watch his heart every day. Furthermore, as we have said before, this constitutes what is called 'nepsis', watchfulness. The saint says: "Examine yourself daily in the sight of God, and discover which of the passions is in your heart. Cast it out and so escape His judgement"⁶⁹. So it is essential to be watchful of your heart⁷⁰.

Through this ascetic effort a person acquires the great virtue of discretion, which all the holy Fathers respect and consider to be closely connected with illumination of the nous. Through watchfulness and guarding of the nous the ascetics acquire discrimination of the virtues and vices, they know which virtue to practise alone and which to practise when their brothers are present, which virtue comes first, and which second or third; they know which passion attacks the soul and which the body, which virtues concern the soul and which the body, and which evils beget other evils⁷¹. In this way the person attains dispassion. For so long as there is war, a person is under the power of fear

67. Ibid. p. 25,14

68. Ibid. p. 23,7

69. Ibid. p. 26,20

70. Ibid. p. 26,21

71. Ibid. p. 27,24

and trembling, wondering whether he will be defeated or will win, but "dispassion is invincible". By the grace of God the prize has been won. And this dispassion is the union of the three: body, soul and spirit. Of course the spirit is the grace of God. "When the three become one through the energy of the Holy Spirit, they cannot again be separated"⁷².

A result of the liberation of the nous is that prayer becomes undistracted. This means that the person's nous is illuminated by the grace of God. Then he communes with God in stillness, "guarding his thoughts from distraction and his nous from curiosity"⁷³.

This ascetic effort is the foundation of the spiritual life. Through this the person is released from the dominion of death, the passions and sin. Through this effort the nous is liberated from the passions and reasoning and is prepared for the vision of God. We cannot speak of the spiritual life apart from this reality.

4. Foolishness for Christ as a life of freedom

What has been said has helped us to understand the moral standards of true freedom. The freedom in Christianity is not philosophical and moral, not simply a choice between two states, but it is purely theological. It is closely connected with overcoming death and liberating the nous from the domination of reasoning, the passions and the environment. It is only in an ascetic life in Christ that we can become truly free. The rebirth of man makes it possible for us to experience freedom.

72. Ibid. p. 26,18

73. Ibid. P. 27,23

Thus we cannot speak of the freedom of morality without first examining the morality of freedom. In fact when man is reborn, when he experiences the uncreated, purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God, he becomes free and then he acquires what is called freedom of morality, that is to say, he is released from political, social and religious expediencies of a conventional human morality.

We can see this very thing in the life of the fools for Christ. Therefore in this section we shall attempt a small introduction into the phenomenon of the fools for Christ in order to look at the preconditions for experiencing true freedom.

Of course this will not be a specialised investigation into the whole spectrum of foolishness for Christ. That would presuppose a detailed study of the lives of the fools for Christ. For practical reasons we shall limit ourselves chiefly to one of them, St. Symeon, who lived in Syria in the sixth century and whose biography was written by Bishop Leontios of Neapolis in Cyprus. We shall also refer several times to St. Andrew the Fool for Christ, who lived in the fifth century according to some and in the ninth century according to others.

The life of St. Symeon, the fool for Christ and for Christ's sake is very interesting and significant. On reading the details as described by Leontios, one will be deeply moved and will see what the Christian life is. Indeed Christians cannot all experience in its full depth what St. Symeon lived through, but all Christians can attune themselves in that direction. I regret that this analysis may at some points do an injustice both to the life of the saint and to St. Symeon himself. But I shall try to have us look at his life in terms of what we have said before about freedom for Christ.

a) What are the fools for Christ

I must begin by making it clear that it is not easy to study such lives. We are liable to misinterpret them. We may focus on certain external aspects of their life and do them an injustice. It requires much grace from God to be able to see spiritual freedom within outward trials, to see saintliness within outwardly "immoral" deeds. In the life of St. Symeon it seems that a certain devout deacon in Emesa in Syria was able to understand this whole way of life loved by God "through the divine grace granted to him"⁷⁴. Only those "favoured with grace" can understand the activity of the saints, especially of those who attempt the fool for reasons which we shall explain.

The fools for Christ belong to a category of men who decided to follow a difficult path. Living in cities, they pretended to be mad. They did things which a madman would do, but these deeds had substantial content. These fools had noetic energy in the highest degree; they still had sound minds, but they chose a hard road and way of life. In Orthodox theology we say that there are some men who have noetic energy developed to a high degree without having comparable brain power at their disposal; others have rational energy developed to a high degree, but their nous is darkened; others have a high degree of noetic energy and a high degree of rational energy, while there are others who have neither rational power nor an illuminated nous. This fits in the framework of the Orthodox Tradition, according to which the energy of the nous is different from that of reason. The fools for Christ had their minds intact but they also had a high degree of noetic en-

74. PG 93, 1676

ergy. But in their actions they did preposterous things in order to appear mad.

It is said of St. Symeon that "everything that he did he concealed with mad and odd behaviour"⁷⁵. In another place it says "Abba Symeon was playing the fool"⁷⁶. The word "playing" is very characteristic. He was not a fool, but he appeared the fool. He did things to persuade men "that he acted like this because he was not in his right mind"⁷⁷. It is said of St. Andrew that all day he not only did various things, but he also spoke false words "as if being out of his mind"⁷⁸.

Men's opinions were divided about St. Symeon. Most people thought that he really was a fool, but there were also some who were illuminated by the Holy Spirit and understood the depth of his actions. Most people said: "The man is mad"⁷⁹. They gave such information to the other people who wanted to find out about it. For a society which based even moral worth on the rational alone, the expressions of the fools in Christ were madness. St. Symeon was mocking them all, "the monks in particular"⁸⁰. And of course there was a serious reason for coming to such action.

But for others, things were different. They saw that a depth was concealed beneath every act and word. Therefore they said of St. Symeon: "See the words of a fool, or rather a wise saint"⁸¹. The moment when his words and deeds seemed foolish was the moment when there were openings and chinks for someone who had the grace of God within him to understand that these were words of a saint.

75. PG 93, 1725

76. PG 93, 1724

77. PG 93, 1712-1713

78. PG 111, 640

79. PG 93, 1721

80. PG 93, 1721

81. PG 93, 1733

When Symeon and his friend John went to the Monastery in order to become monks, the Abbot, whose name was Nikon, received a communication from God: "Rise and open the gate of the sheepfold so that my sheep may come in". Thus the fools are characterised as "Christ's sheep"⁸². In another place they are called "Christ's sealed sheep"⁸³. The word "sealed" indicates that they have received the grace of God and their hearts have been sealed by Christ. These sheep of Christ are also called "pure brides of Christ"⁸⁴. St. Symeon was mostly called a fool and insane, but sometimes, not being able to attribute all his actions to madness, they called him a saint. At all events these were Christ's true sheep.

His biographer ornaments him with many epithets. He is called "a luminary" and "all-wise", "a pearl", who "passed through mire unstained", and his way of life is characterised as "angelic"⁸⁵. St. Symeon appeared to someone in a dream with a crown of palm branches on his head: "Once a monk with a crown of palm branches on his head told me these things"⁸⁶. The greatness and glory of St. Symeon are presented in the troparia of the service for him. I would like to quote two of them. In the first it says: "You became an all-bright star guiding towards life those in the mire of passions". Another troparion says: "Moderate in thought, compassionate, loving God and filled with love, divinely inspired, you appeared humble, meek, like an angel, walking on earth in a heavenly way"⁸⁷.

The same epithets are also used of St. Andrew the Fool

82. PG 93, 1677

83. PG 93, 1689

84. PG 93, 1689

87. Troparia from the service of the saint, July 21st

85. PG 93, 1672

86. PG 93, 17116

for Christ. Among other things he is called and characterised as a "chosen instrument, a saint, and loved in the Spirit"⁸⁸. This characterisation is also given by St. John the Theologian. When, towards the end, the biographer is describing St Andrew's godly way of life and his falling asleep in glory, he concludes: "The hidden sun and sky-high pillar of fire, blessed Andrew, who for the Lord's sake was poor and a stranger, scorned and overpowered by all, has finished... having hiddenly competed in the contest, but discerned by God as having competed well"⁸⁹.

These, then, were the fools for Christ. Men full of the Holy Spirit, who depicted and played the fool for many reasons and were the opposite of the men of their time. For most they were fools, for some they were saints and wise men, God-inspired and very bright suns. They were truly a scandal in the shocking society of their time. They lived above reason in a society devoid of reason. They had divested themselves of the "wealth" of the mind and of reason in a society which rested excessively on that wealth of the mind and of conventional morals.

b) The reason for their emergence

In studying the lives of the fools in Christ one cannot overlook the fact that they were called directly by God to this work. They did not play the fool out of their own desire and their own will, but because God called them to this arduous and difficult life. Just as in the Old Testament God called the Prophets to lead a stiff-necked and difficult people, it is the same in the case of the fools. God called them to this mission.

88. PG 111, 640

89. PG 111, 888

The conversation between St. Symeon and his fellow ascetic John, when the former announced his intention to take up this difficult mission, is very characteristic. Symeon says to him: "Believe me, I am not going to stay, but by the power of God I will go to delude the world". John tells him that he himself cannot follow him into this mission: "For I have not yet reached the stature to delude the world". Then he tries by different arguments to dissuade him from following this martyr's life. Among other things he tells him that great care is needed, because the world will probably scatter what he has gathered in the stillness and the desert, and that by sleeping he will lose what the vigil was offering, that association with women will deprive him of what he has gained through self-control and prudence, and laughter will scatter his nous, and in general there is danger that his soul will be influenced by what he does outwardly. This was really a serious danger. St. Symeon replies: "I am not doing this of my own choice, but because God commands me"⁹⁰.

From this conversation it seems that the call to this life is purely God's call and not a human will. He is to walk the earth in order to deceive it "in the power of Christ". He has the conviction that it is not his own will, but God has called him to this work. Likewise he makes this decision with a knowledge of the dangers which this way of life entails. But John too knows very well that the choice of this way of life is a matter of spiritual progress and he knows clearly that he himself has not reached that spiritual level. All these things show that the choice of being a fool for Christ is not a random anthropocentric choice, but a calling from God.

90. PG 93, 1704-1705

We also find the same thing in the life of St Andrew the fool for Christ. He receives information and a command from God: "Be a fool for my sake, and you will be a master of many good things in the day of my kingdom"⁹¹. It is not the man who chooses, but God Himself who sends him. It is an apostolic and prophetic service. The fool for Christ is a Prophet, Apostle, Martyr and Saint.

It is an imitation of Christ at great depth. The biographer of St. Symeon points out this fact, showing the theological interpretation of foolishness for Christ. Just as Christ took the form of a man and came into the world to save the world, so too St. Symeon takes the form of the world of that time in order to lead it to salvation. Just as Christ, "for the salvation of his servant, did not consider it unworthy, without change, to take on the form of a servant", so also the saint imitates his Lord, offering his soul and body in order to offer salvation"⁹². This theological interpretation is the greatest honour for the fools in Christ.

St. Symeon accomplished a great work. His biographer describes it analytically. But there are also statements giving the general purpose for which he played the fool. At one point it says: "For the righteous man did some of his deeds out of love for the salvation of men and other things to conceal his achievements"⁹³. He employed many methods for saving men's souls. Sometimes he punished in a comical and laughable way, at other times he performed miracles, behaving in a silly way, and at other times he gave messages "by doing something stupid"⁹⁴. He did these things, on the one hand, for men's salvation, and on the other hand, to conceal his virtue and the spiritual heights

91. PG 111, 637

92. PG 93, 1673

93. PG 93, 1713

94. PG 93, 1728

which he had attained. In what follows we shall look more analytically at the great work which he accomplished by these foolish acts, which will also show us the purpose for which he took up this martyr's service to the people.

In all these ways he was pursuing the salvation of whores of people. He decided to abandon the desert, where he was living the ascetic life, with the thought: "Rise, let us go, let us save others as well"⁹⁵. He was aiming at the indolent, who out of indolence did not do good work. Because the indolent had decided that salvation was impossible, St. Symeon demonstrated that by the power of God everything could be achieved⁹⁶. For this purpose he many times reproached men, put a stop to sins, sent trials to certain people to correct them, foretold the future, "and did whatever he wanted"⁹⁷.

He ascribed especially great importance to the salvation of those women who lived a dissipated life. According to the witness of his biographer, many times by playful actions he brought some indecent or whoring women to lawful marriage, and attracting others with money, he brought them to reason, while by the purity which distinguished him he brought others to compunction so that they followed the monastic life⁹⁸. And in this way he saved these women who were despised by the people of their time.

He also used several methods for achieving the salvation of these women. He asked them: "Do you want me to kiss you? and I'll give you a hundred coins. They were persuaded and after he gave them the money, which God had invisibly granted him for the purpose, he made them promise not to sin. When one of the whores broke her prom-

95. PG 93, 1704

96. PG 93, 1672

97. PG 93, 1725

98. PG 93, 1708

ise, the saint shouted: "You transgressed! Holy, holy make her pay for it!" And through illnesses or other difficulties he made them come to reason and not break their oath⁹⁹.

In general, he aimed to save people, to guide them to repentance and to their senses, that they should live rightly all their life. A characteristic case has survived, in which a young man became possessed because he had prostituted a married woman. Then the saint wanted "both to bring him to his senses and to cure him". Employing various methods he approached the demonised man and struck him on the chin, saying: "Stop committing adultery, base fellow, and the demon will not come near you". And the man was actually freed from the demon¹⁰⁰. The saint also accomplished many miracles in order to free people from the devil's domination. On seeing a conjurer doing "unlawful things" and wanting to stop such an evil, the righteous man" took a small stone, made the sign of the cross, and threw it in the direction of the conjurer. It hit him in the right hand and "withered it". Later the saint appeared to him in his sleep and explained why this happened to him. The conjurer swore by the Panagia that he would not do such things in the future and at once his hand was healed. The saint appeared in the sleep of a certain lord, the ruler of the city of Emesa, who had fallen into the sin of adultery and therefore was being led towards death, and said to him: "But give me your word that you will no longer defile your wife's bed, and I will crush him for you and he will not defeat you"¹⁰¹.

St. Symeon in his own way taught people to do the will of God in their daily lives. When John the deacon had been

99. PG 93, 1725

101. PG 93, 1716

100. PG 93, 1713

terribly slandered and they were leading him to his death, the saint prayed for him and he was released through his prayers. But then he showed him the reason for this slander. He told him: "This tribulation came upon you because yesterday those two poor people came to you and you, who were well-off, declined to give them anything"¹⁰². Illuminated by the Holy Spirit and guided by Him, he shamed the thieves, the fornicators, those who did not frequently partake of Holy Communion, those who committed perjury, "so that in this way he contrived to prevent almost the whole city from committing sins"¹⁰³. And the miracles which he performed were intended for the cure of people's souls, correction of their evil deeds, and their salvation. He did not perform miracles simply for show, but to cure men's souls¹⁰⁴. Thus in all these ways he was aiming at men's salvation.

The work of St. Symeon and of all the fools for Christ was aimed at mocking society, a society which had stayed only on the surface and did not know the depth. It is always so, that surface morality, artificial politeness, and pharisaism know nothing of the depth of the spiritual life. We are not against morality, but against moralising, when we remain on the surface and are not interested in the nous and the heart. Making a religion of Christianity, changing Christianity from a Church to a religion or an ideology, is the greatest problem, the greatest "crime" against the Church. What St. Symeon said to his fellow ascetic, St. John is characteristic: "Believe me, I am not staying, but I am going in the power of Christ to delude the world"¹⁰⁵. And in fact by the power of Christ he mocked a hypocrit-

102. PG 93, 1732-1733

103. PG 93, 1736

104. PG 93, 1733

105. PG 93, 1704

ical society which kept Christ's commandments only outwardly and disregarded the depth of the heart.

Reading the life of St. Symeon, we see that all his mad actions were aimed at demolishing artificial behaviour. The fact that he associated with the prostitutes, whom people of the time frowned on as pollutions, the fact that he did things which were not considered rational just because society relied on the rational and the proper, shows that St. Symeon was play-acting and bringing shame on a false and conventional society. But I should like at this point to cite two occasions which are expressive.

John the deacon, seeing the hardness of his life and that he had been exhausted and worn out by asceticism, felt sorry for him and asked him whether he would like to build up his strength by bathing in the public baths. The saint took off his garment at once and put it on his head as a kerchief. The pious deacon John said to him: "Put it on, brother, because if you walk naked, I will not come with you". The saint did not listen to John's advice and went on. When he approached the public baths, naked as he was, he went into the women's bath. Then all the women rushed at him, thrashed him and threw him out. It was not a habitual act. The saint wanted to show the value of the dispassion which Adam had before his disobedience and which man can attain. Therefore, as his biographer says, he went to the women's bath "as in the glory of the Lord". And later the saint confessed that he felt "just like a block of wood"¹⁰⁶.

The other incident is one of the first things he did, when he went to Emesa to mock the world. On the first Sunday after he came to Emesa he went to the Church and was

106. PG 93, 1713

throwing walnuts and extinguishing the candles at the beginning of the divine Liturgy. While they chased him to throw him out the saint went up on an ambo "and from there pelted the women with nuts". The result was that they were beating him to death¹⁰⁷. The saint proceeded to do this, because, among other reasons, he was seeing hypocritical worship. People of his time abandoned inner noetic worship, they did not cultivate the inner world, but rather cultivated the passions in their hearts and were occupied only with superficial liturgical acts. This was real hypocrisy. St. Symeon's act resembled what Christ said: "This people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15,8).

In any case the fact is that by his various acts and words the saint wanted to show the height of virtue to which man can and should attain. And when a society is based only on conventional morality, especially when it is made absolute and self sufficiency appears, then it must be swatted. The fools, rich in the grace of God, did this great work. In this way St. Symeon directed men's attention to the inner life. And this apparently was the aim of his foolish, deeds. People's attention should be turned towards the heart, because the core of our being is there. This does not mean that we disregard the outer wrapping, but neither can we make it an absolute. One act which he often did is characteristic. Having spent the whole night in prayer and tears, the next morning he would wear a wreath of olive or other leaves on his head, and holding a branch in his hands, would cry out: "Victory for the kingdom and the city"¹⁰⁸. He called man's soul the city, and the kingdom was the thinking which must

107. PG 93, 1708-1709

108. PG 93, 1741

be the absolute ruler of the passions. In this way he pointed toward turning inward, cultivation of the inner world.

He also tried to act as if possessed of a demon in order to enrage the evil spirits. His biographer cites this case, which is very characteristic. The saint felt such deep sympathy with those who were possessed that he pretended to be possessed, and living with them he cured them through prayer. Indeed some of the demonised said: "Oh bad luck, fool, you ridicule the whole world, and have you also come near us to annoy us? Go away from here, you are not one of us. Why do you torment us all night and burn us?"¹⁰⁹. As we shall explain later, none of these things can be done by men who have not been freed from the domination of the devil and do not have in them an abundance of the energy of divine grace. At all events this incident too shows the great boldness which the saint had. It is not an easy thing to live with the possessed, to love them excessively, to sympathise with them, and to free them from the domination of the evil spirits.

Thus, apart from other things, he did these things in order to mock the devil as well, not only to annoy him, but also to make fun of him. This craft of St. Symeon is seen in the service to him. In one troparion it says: "Blest through evil, with your pretences you maddened the inventor of evil, performing absurdities". And another troparion says: "Symeon wisely feigns stupidity, driving mad the inventor of evil, through actions invented by the all-wise Spirit"¹¹⁰. That is to say that by apparent foolishness, but with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit he drove mad the inventor of evil, the devil.

109. PG 93, 1736

110. Service for St. Symeon, July 21st

Within the whole healing nature of his mission St. Symeon, by his seemingly illogical actions, but also through miraculous interventions, tried to save the heretics as well, by bringing them back to the Orthodox Church. Once the saint took live coals from the fire with his hands and began to burn incense. This was seen by the wife of a seller of wine, i.e., a producer of a concoction of that time, and she was astonished. She cried: "You are God". The monk did this because that couple belonged to the heresy of the Akephaloi, monophysites who had separated from their bishop and therefore were and are called Headless¹¹¹. The same thing happened another time as well. Because of various events a few Akephaloi heretics "became orthodox, having Symeon as their cure"¹¹². The same thing is described by a Jewish glass-ware merchant. By making the sign of the Cross, the saint broke the glasses of the glass-maker. And then he said: "Really, bastard, until you make the sign of the cross on your forehead, everything will break to pieces... and in the end he went and became a Christian"¹¹³. Thus even the miracles which he accomplished had a deep purpose: they were aimed at the salvation of men.

St. Symeon and all the fools for Christ took upon themselves other people's guilt as their own. They did not seek to justify their deeds. And what is more, they accepted slander from others and behaved as the greatest of sinners. His biographer offers an expressive example.

The saint had the habit of entering the homes of the rich and indeed "many times even pretending to cover their servants with kisses. Once a servant was pregnant by someone, and because she was afraid to reveal the father, she

111. PG 93, 1709

112. PG 93, 1724

113. PG 93, 1736-1737

attributed the act to St. Symeon. She said: "Symeon the fool raped me". One day when the saint visited that home, the servant's mistress said: "Well, Abba Symeon, so you corrupted my servant and made her pregnant". The saint did not remonstrate, indeed he found it a unique opportunity, so he laughed, bowed his head and said: "Come, come, now, poor dear, she will give birth for you, and you will have a little Symeon". And as it says in the biography, as long as the woman was pregnant, the saint carried various foods to her, saying: "Eat, my wife". But when the time came for the birth, she could not give birth. And then the saint said that the child would not be born if she did not reveal who was its father, which the woman did, and straightaway she gave birth"¹¹⁴.

This instance shows that the saint accepted men's slander as well, when God wanted to manifest something different. And this was a terrible whip against a society which rested on dignity and outward purity, a society which always wanted to justify acts and to ascribe falling and sin to other elements.

Finally, the saint did these mad acts in order to conceal his virtue. This is an art which all the athletes of the spirit use in order to advance in their spiritual life with humility and without men's praises. What Archimandrite Sophrony writes about the attempt of monks to conceal their ascetic achievements is characteristic.

"Concealing one's inner self from others is very important in the life of every ascetic. There are many reasons that make this a necessity. On Mt. Athos, besides the motives common to everyone there are others dictated by

114. PG 93, 1717

local conditions. The Athonite monasteries and deserts contain many men who have forsworn the world and gone through the flames of renunciation. With the rare exception all of them in their elan towards God have offered a sacrifice by which the world was crucified unto them, and they unto the world (cf. Gal. 6,14). Each one has performed this sacrifice to the utmost of his strength, and so practically every one of them believes that he has realised it completely. After this ascetic effort, after this sacrifice, realising that he has not attained to what he sought, a monk may suffer an especial temptation - spiritual jealousy. Like Cain when he saw that his brother Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to the Lord, while his, Cain's, was rejected, from envy rose up against his brother and slew him (cf. Gen. 4:4-8), so monks, even if they do not go so far as to kill their brother physically, often create extremely difficult conditions for him spiritually. But, aside from these attempts to put obstacles in the way of the religious life of anyone seen to be making progress in prayer and other spiritual disciplines, the private torment endured by the ascetic conscious of his own failures is enough to keep him silent about his inner life.

"There are many people in the world who would like to see a saint, to offer him their tribute, and this exposes the ascetic to the danger of pride. But there are also spiteful people who cannot tolerate saintliness and become even more spiteful than ever. However, the overwhelming majority lack experience and do not understand the spiritual man, which makes it easy for them to stay private. It is more difficult to conceal oneself from monks, who live their lives in spiritual striving and can tell by numerous, hardly perceptible signs what their fellow brothers are going through. So the brethren on Mt. Athos must learn so to

comport themselves outwardly that nothing transpires of their inner life. The ascetics on Mt. Athos would seem to achieve this to a high degree"¹¹⁵.

In the life of St. Symeon this side of his foolishness appears as well. Apart from the other things, these fools acted "in such a way as to conceal their occupations"¹¹⁶. He begged God not to allow the hair of his head or his beard to grow long lest by cutting it he should betray the fact that he was playing the fool"¹¹⁷. If sometimes after the performance of a miracle, those present confessed that he was a saint, then the saint "left that neighbourhood until what he did should have been forgotten"¹¹⁸. And his various deeds were done with the single purpose of deceiving the eyes of men in order that they should not honour his ascetic achievements. All week he did not touch bread, but many times he publicly ate meat, "and no one was aware of his fasting, but he ate meat in front of them, in order to deceive them"¹¹⁹. It is in this framework that we must look at the following incident as well. Because as a result of a miraculous event, a certain inn-keeper "considered him holy", St. Symeon planned a trick to make him discard the good idea which he had of him. When the man's wife was sleeping alone, "Abba Symeon approached her and made as if he was undressing", with the intention of committing sin with her. The woman woke up and shouted and threw him out in the cold, hitting him. From then on the inn-keeper regarded him not only as insane, but also as possessed of a demon. He said: "He is truly possessed. I saw him with my own eyes, and no one can persuade me that

115. Archim. Sophrony: Saint Silouan the Athonite. p. 248f

116. PG 93, 1713

118. PG 93, 1709-1712

117. PG 93, 1741

119. PG 93 1712

he did not want to commit adultery with my wife if he could have managed"¹²⁰. Thus the saint succeeded in concealing the miracle which he had performed.

In the lives of the fools for Christ there were always people who knew that the man was pretending to be a fool while he had a great many spiritual virtues. This was true also in the case of St. Symeon. A certain godly deacon named John knew the fact, and the saint often spoke with him. Therefore when the two were alone together, "he did not play the fool at all". He behaved with harmony and devoutness "so that often a fragrance came from his mouth"¹²¹. In this way God manifested the grace which existed within the soul of St. Symeon. The saint made spiritual conversation and company with John the deacon, but at the same time "threatened that if he revealed to anyone his true purpose, he would suffer great torment in the next life"¹²².

Consequently, the purpose of the appearing of the fools for Christ was multifarious. As we said before, the fools for Christ were aiming at the salvation of their brethren, at ridiculing the superficial and hypocritical society, at promoting the inner life and showing this way, at ridiculing the devil, at the return of the heretics to Orthodoxy, at taking on the guilt of others, after the pattern of Christ, at hinting that one should conceal one's virtues and all one's ascetic achievements. If we pay attention to all these things, we shall discover that this way of life is an imitation of the life of Christ and, applied in reasonable proportion and adjustment, it is the genuine way of living the Christian life.

120. PG 93, 1712

121. PG 93, 1733

122. PG 93, 1741

c) The preconditions of foolishness in Christ

When studying the life of the fools in Christ, one finds oneself faced with a danger. This danger consists in autonomising and making absolute certain incidents in their lives. That is to say, one may look at some events in their lives at the expense of the whole spirit and atmosphere surrounding them. It is possible to look at them from the angle that they ridiculed the world and made dust of men's outer pursuits, and be unaware that the fools for Christ were aiming at the salvation of men and the concealment of their own virtues.

One of the most fundamental aspects of foolishness in Christ is the analysis of its preconditions. We must examine carefully what the conditions are for anyone choosing this hazardous and great work. This is one of the most fundamental points.

In studying the life of St. Symeon the fool for Christ, we easily discover that he did not pursue this way of life through his own wish, but through a calling from God Himself. And he practised this work by the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The fools had reached a high degree of spiritual life, they had experienced enlightenment of the nous and the vision of God. We shall see precisely these points, the presuppositions of anyone's appointment to this way of life, in what follows in the life and conduct of St. Symeon.

The Apostle Paul writes to his disciple Timothy: "if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2, 5). Only after competing according to the rules can one be crowned. This was also the case with St. Symeon. His biographer says: "for he did not return to the world unprepared and still in need of spiritual guidance". When he saw himself girded

with the power of the Holy Spirit, when he received the power to tread upon snakes and scorpions, when he had extinguished the burning of the flesh with the dew of the holy Spirit, when he had acquired dispassion of body and soul and had been granted divine sonship, "then he too stepped out upon the world, called from the desert by God as into single combat against the devil"¹²³. He was trained beforehand, and afterwards by the power of the Holy Spirit he went into single combat with the devil. For in fact the life of St. Symeon was a continuous struggle against the evil spirits.

St. Symeon had gone with John to a Monastery, for the longing for holy stillness had developed in them. God had revealed to a wonderful man named Nikon, who had the gift of prophecy, that the two young men were coming. Thus after a revelation of Christ he greeted them, saying: "Christ's sheep are welcome". Turning to Symeon, he had said to him: "Welcome, fool. For the ten are waiting for you". He foresaw that Symeon would become a fool for Christ and that he would reach a great height of virtue and perfection, greater than John¹²⁴. St. Nikon catechised them with the whole orthodox teaching about monasticism. Thus these two brothers not only were called by God to the monastic way of life, but they were also granted experienced teaching about divine things. After the teaching "the wise doctor and teacher" asked them whether they would like to become monks or to remain laymen for a time. Then, "by a single thought, or rather by the one holy Spirit, they both fell at the feet of the abbot, asking him without fail to tonsure them at once"¹²⁵. It is clear that they followed the

123. PG 93, 1672-1673

125. PG 93, 1684

124. PG 93, 1677-1680

monastic life by the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, St. Symeon wanted the tonsuring so badly that he said that if he did not wish to keep him, he would go to another Monastery. Thus, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit and through the wise guidance and experience of the holy abbot, he received the monastic schema.

It is significant and should be noted that Nikon foresaw by divine inspiration that they would not remain very long at the Monastery, but would pursue another life. "For he knew that God had arranged things so that they would not remain with him for a long time"¹²⁶.

After receiving the holy schema they also both had an experience of divine grace. They saw their faces during the night, just as they saw them in the daytime: their faces were illuminated, and each one saw a crown on the head of the other. And as St. Symeon told the tale: "Our souls were so joyous that it was not easy to take food or drink"¹²⁷. This is a matter of spiritual states, indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit. As St. Symeon said to John: "In this schema I see another life and strange things". On the day when he became a monk he said: "My insides are burning, I do not know from what, and my soul wants not to see or speak or hear anything"¹²⁸.

Two days after the service in which they received the great and angelic schema they made the decision to go into the desert in order to preserve the grace of God which they had received. Of course they did this with the blessing of the holy abbot, because he had received assurance from God: "Go out, sheep sealed by Christ, into your pasture"¹²⁹.

126. PG 93, 1686

127. PG 93, 1688

128. PG 93, 1688

129. PG 93, 1689

Amazed and surprised at "those who two days before were worldly had so suddenly been made wise by being clothed in the holy schema", Nikon gave them his blessing to go out into the desert¹³⁰. And after giving them guidance for this journey which they had chosen through being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and "after making the sign of the cross on their foreheads and chests and their whole bodies, he let them go"¹³¹.

They remained in the desert for twenty-nine years, fighting the devil and being fought by him¹³². And not only did they fight the devil, but they conquered him on all levels. After so many years of asceticism, St. Symeon was enlightened by God to go into the world and delude it, with the single aim of saving the people's souls. Here we see clearly that this was preceded by a legitimate struggle. He did not go out into the world of his own will, but was informed by God. The saint himself said to John: "Of myself I do not want to do this, but I am commanded by God"¹³³. Although St. John pointed out the difficulty of the work he was undertaking, still in the end he was persuaded to let him go, because he knew "that he had been informed by God that he was to do this"¹³⁴.

Thus his departure from the desert and his entrance into the world to carry out his work took place after a legitimate struggle, after a blessing by God, and also after a blessing from his spiritual fathers and brothers. It was not the work of men, but God's calling. I think that anyone studying the life of the fools for Christ must very seriously consider this point.

130. PG 93, 1692

131. PG 93, 1696

132. PG 93, 1701

133. PG 93, 1705

134. PG 93, 1704

But let us look more analytically at how much training the saint had as he prepared to enter the world.

He was turned loose into the desert by the war of the flesh and by all the rebellions of the flesh. As the saint relates, in the desert at the beginning of his monastic life he suffered terrible carnal temptation. In his tribulation he called upon God and St. Nikon to redeem him from this temptation. Then Nikon came and "took water from the Jordan and threw it over his navel, making the sign of the cross, and said to him: 'There, you are well'". After this event the saint himself asserted: "Neither in sleep nor waking have I felt a bodily burning"¹³⁵. So in the desert all the capers of the flesh withered and even rose to the height of dispassion and purity. "He attained such a height of purity and dispassion", that while afterwards he went through many temptations and many dangers, he remained most pure, like a pearl in the mud¹³⁶. His body had received the grace of the Holy Spirit after and by the prayer of St. Nikon: "May their bodies and souls and spirits be illuminated by the Light of the knowledge of Thee..."¹³⁷. That is why he seemed as if bodiless. "It was as if he was entirely bodiless"¹³⁸. Thus by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit St. Symeon "also had the gift of self-control beyond many of the saints"¹³⁹.

Control of the body is not independent of its transformation. In fact, in the Orthodox Tradition we know very well that the body too is changed by the energy of the Holy Spirit. Man's rebirth is not a rebirth of the soul alone, but of the soul and body. In the desert the saint lived noetic

135. PG 93, 1724-1725

136. PG 93, 1672

137. PG 93, 1693

138. PG 93, 1712

139. PG 93, 1728

hesychia in all its intensity. He lived "inner hesychia". In the words of St. John, his nous remained "motionless and undisturbed" in the desert¹⁴⁰. Here is the whole traditional training which our Church has. The endeavour is for the nous to remain motionless and transparent within the heart and to be speaking the name of God.

He had attained the noetic prayer which is unceasing within the heart. When the two were living in the desert, they lived by the whole content of hesychia, of body as well as nous, and throughout the day and night they were living in "carefree care", the unceasing noetic prayer. In this way the tireless workers made quick progress, so that in a few years they were granted divine visions and assurances and wonders"¹⁴¹. During the stillness and prayer St. Symeon attained ecstasy¹⁴².

Thus through the right asceticism, especially noetic stillness and unceasing prayer, St. Symeon attained great measures of perfection and acquired dispassion of body and soul. This is called ecstasy in the language of the Fathers. Ecstasy is not the loss of a person's wits, but the entry of his nous into his heart, so that he is no longer possessed by a worldly and carnal spirit. As his biographer indicates, "through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, he felt that he feared neither passion nor cold nor hunger nor heat, but had almost surpassed the limits of human nature"¹⁴³. In the language of the Fathers this is called vision of God, during which all the bodily energies are suspended and the person experiences true dispassion in the orthodox, not the stoic, sense of the word.

Since he had the Holy Spirit perceptibly within him, he

140. PG 93, 1705

141. PG 93, 1697-1700

142. PG 93, 1700

143. PG 93, 1704

was not contaminated at all, although he was in places of sin. He had become a light and as a result he lightened the darkness of his surroundings. As a light he was not darkened by the darkness of his surroundings, but he lightened it, and in this way he led the people to repentance and salvation. It is only within this theological atmosphere that we must look at the "follies" of St. Symeon; otherwise we will do an injustice to him as well as to foolishness for Christ.

He attained such measures of perfection that many times he was dancing between two actors, but the old man, like pure gold, was not at all polluted by them"¹⁴⁴. When he entered the women's bath naked, he was entering "as upon the glory of the Lord". And later he himself said: "I was like a block of wood among blocks of wood then. I did not feel that I had a body, nor that I was among bodies. But my whole nous was in God's work and did not fall away from it"¹⁴⁵. Even in this difficult situation his nous was fastened upon God. This is a sample of highest purity. He was always protected by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, and so he existed above the devil's fire without being injured by it at all¹⁴⁶. Divine grace always accompanied him in his life, because God saw the purpose which had to be fulfilled. "In the final analysis it was God who was concealing the purpose of Abba Symeon"¹⁴⁷. The purity of his body is seen from the witness given by someone who confessed that "he had once seen him bathing, and two angels talking with him"¹⁴⁸.

St. Symeon had received many gifts of grace from the

144. PG 93, 1724

145. PG 93, 1713

146. PG 93, 1713

147. PG 93, 1740

148. PG 93, 1724

Holy Spirit. In the first place, he had the gift of distinguishing spirits. St. John sent various fathers to St. Symeon saying: "Fathers, I have not yet received the gift of discerning God's counsels, but go to Symeon the fool"¹⁴⁹. Many incidents have been preserved which show that St. Symeon had acquired the gift of foresight¹⁵⁰.

Furthermore, what he did, he did by the divine grace dwelling within him. Once, in the face of a deadly plague, in a school he kissed each pupil who was going to die. And his biographer says: "Not all were kissed, but whoever was indicated to him by the grace of God"¹⁵¹.

St. Symeon had a hidden place in which he prayed unseen by the eyes of men. It is written very characteristically: "He withdrew to a secret place where he always prayed, which no one knew, except his God-loving friend John, and bowing his knees, he begged God to save his servant from such a great danger"¹⁵². He had a hut in which he lay at night, "rather for keeping vigil through the nights". There was nothing else in it excepting some vine branches. Many times he spent the whole night praying "and watering the ground with his tears"¹⁵³.

According to these presuppositions St. Symeon was very pure, dispassionate in soul and body, and indeed "he had no evil or cunning"¹⁵⁴. This innocence and guilelessness is not a natural quality, but a result and fruit of the vision of God. Purity of heart, illumination of the nous and the vision of God constitute the innocent and guileless man.

Some of the saint's actions seem hard. When he performed a miracle, asking God to punish a man by wither-

149. PG 93, 1720

150. PG 93, 1721 and 1732

151. PG 93, 1717

152. PG 93, 1732

153. PG 93, 1741

154. PG 93, 1684

ing his hand, etc., he did it for his salvation. When one reads such actions, one can come to the point of maintaining that the saint was very hard. And yet he had tremendous sensitivity. This moreover is the characteristic sign of holiness, and the most characteristic mark of the saints. The saint loved his mother very much. He had a very great struggle over leaving her in order to pursue the monastic life. And finally this son's love could not conquer him and keep him from becoming a disciple of Christ. God assured him two years after his departure that his mother was "free from sorrow" and that He took care every night to comfort her¹⁵⁵.

The events connected with the falling asleep of his mother are very characteristic. The saint fell into ecstasy and saw his mother ill. He asked her how she was and to her reply that she was well, he said to her: "Go towards the King, do not be afraid, because I have asked him and He has prepared a fine place for you, and when He wishes I will come there". The saint understood that his mother had fallen asleep, and then he wakened John for them to pray. This prayer is wonderful and shows the saint's love for his mother. He asks God to receive his mother's soul, to remember the labours which she spent for him, and also to remember the sighs and tears which she poured forth when he departed to become a monk, to remember her breasts which fed him without gratification, because at a young age he left for the desert. He prays to God not to forget that while his mother could not do without him even for a little time, yet he deprived her of all the years, deprived her for His Name's sake. He asks Him not to forget her heartache at the time when he decided to become a

155. PG 93, 1697

monk, her sleepless nights thinking of him, the pain which swept over her on seeing his clothes, that she could not have the comfort of serving God. Then he asks God to give her angels to protect her soul from the evil spirits¹⁵⁶.

This prayer is astonishing. If one reads it carefully, one will discover its tenderness towards his mother, his spiritual sensitivity. He loved his mother very much and yet he left her for the love of God. It is not a question of pitilessness, but of entrusting his whole life to God.

St. Andrew, the fool for Christ, was also doing this work by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. He remained in prayer at night, while in the daytime he did "the false things", "as if he were insane". With the idea of beginning the work of foolishness for Christ he prayed to God "and wept at night and asked Christ's witness to inform him whether the effort which he was undertaking was pleasing to God"¹⁵⁷. He did not wish to go into such actions unless he had God's help and approval. St. John the Theologian appeared and told him that God had sent him to protect him in his life. "For the Lord appointed me to look after you at all times, to see to your salvation, and recompense you"¹⁵⁸. Indeed we have information from his biography that while in the daytime he carried on the usual activity, towards midnight he offered to God and to the martyr Anastasia "secret supplications and entreaties in the hidden inner chamber of his heart"¹⁵⁹.

Foolishness in Christ is not a human choice, but God sends the person to do this work. It is a fruit of experience, of purity and of noetic prayer. This is why the fools for Christ reached the point of seeing revealing things invisi-

156. PG 93, 1700-1701

157. PG 111, 640

158. PG 111, 644

159. PG 111, 641

ble to most people. They saw what was in a man, and his future. What is said of Ammonas is characteristic. Some people came to see him and "the old man feigned madness". To the remark of a woman that he was a fool, he replied: "How much labour have I given myself in the desert to acquire this folly and through you I have lost it today!"¹⁶⁰.

So it is essential to interpret the fools for Christ with the orthodox presuppositions. If we examine their lives apart from purification of the heart and illumination of the nous, if we deny these depths of spiritual perfection, we shall fail to see them in their true proportions and will do them an injustice. The fools for Christ were burning with the fire of the Holy Spirit, they were blazing mountains. And therefore they had also acquired the freedom of morality, their life moved on another plane. Actually, apart from purity of heart and an illumined nous, we cannot live in true freedom.

d) The falling asleep of the fools for Christ

I shall not mention all the things that St. Symeon did and which manifested their deepest purposes and deepest meaning. The reader can find and read about them in the books which are available. But I would like to mention the falling asleep of these saints, because it shows the high value of their freedom in Christ and of their whole life.

The fools for Christ did this work with the blessing of God and their spiritual fathers and with the energy of the Holy Spirit. These are the real preconditions for foolishness in Christ, and this is why the fools for Christ have their place within the Body of the Church. Their actions

160. The sayings of the desert fathers, p. 24

were pre-eminently ecclesiastical. In fact each personal act must be referred to the general experience of the Church, otherwise it is fated to be an individual act, which does not lead to salvation, nor does it save the others.

But also the manner in which the fools fled from this world shows their part in the Church, as does their overcoming of death in this life, and this is why they were living in true freedom. We shall take a look at the glorious death of the two fools for Christ, St. Symeon and St. Andrew. What is more, the way in which each finished his life shows his way of life. Man's entire life is aimed at transcending death.

God granted to St. Symeon foreknowledge of his death. Two days before he died he had a conversation about it with the deacon John with whom he was in close touch. He told him that he had visited his brother John with whom he had lived in the desert, and he had seen him wearing a crown on his head that was inscribed: "Crown of endurance of the desert". But deacon John had said to him: "Well now, fool, you should be wearing not one crown, but the crowns of the souls which you brought to me". In telling these things, St. Symeon said that the blessed John was just paying him a compliment, because, fool that he was, he could not have such crowns. Here we see St. Symeon's great humility¹⁶¹.

Then he gave him some advice and indicated to him the love that he should show to the poor and the ill. He revealed to him that many times he had seen country folk going to communion who were more pure than the sun in their innocence and simplicity. Thinking of the rulers of the darkness of this age, the so-called tax-collectors, he

161. PG 93, 1741

said: "For the Lord knows how much care and fear I have, until I am delivered from them"¹⁶². He revealed to him that "within these three days the Lord would take this unworthy Fool", and he asked him to go to his cell after two days to see what he would find. And saying all these things, "he went away and confined himself to his hut"¹⁶³.

The death of the saint was really a sleep. For when he understood that he was leaving the world and "he did not want to receive honour from men after his death", he went down under the vine branches in his holy hut, lay down there, and peacefully gave his spirit to the Lord"¹⁶⁴.

All these things are noteworthy. First of all the saint knew the hour of his death. Then he proceeded to escape as quietly as possible, because he did not wish the honour of men even after his death. Next he withdrew into his cell, which is called holy, because he made it holy by his godly way of life. Then he lay down on the vines and gave up his spirit to God, whom he had loved all his life. All these manifestations are a credit to the fool in Christ, they show him to be a great champion in the spiritual life. He departed in a very peaceful and holy way.

Symeon's absence was felt. Some people went to see whether he was ill. They found him at last under the vines, and they said that truly this was a fool, because even his death showed it. This incident alone shows what was the state of society in his time, that therefore all of St. Symeon's acts are justified. One can see that they had no spiritual criteria. And it is a terrible thing not to have a criterion for understanding right from wrong. This is also seen from what they did next: "Then two of them took him and,

162. PG 93, 1744

164. PG 93, 1744

163. PG 93, 1744

without washing him, without singing psalms, without candles and incense, they went and buried him in the place where they bury strangers"¹⁶⁵.

But God undertook to make known his saint. Therefore when they were going by the house of a Jew who had been made a Christian by the saint, the Jew heard a great multitude passing outside and singing psalms which the lips of man cannot sing. He peered out of the window to see what was going on and saw only two men carrying the precious body of the saint. Then he said: "You are blessed, Fool, because, not having men singing to you, you have heavenly powers honouring you in hymns". He went down and buried the body with his own hands.

Later his friend John the deacon heard about the saint's death and with others wanted to receive the precious body "to give it a worthy burial". But when they opened the tomb, "they did not find it, for the Lord had removed it, glorifying it". Then the people woke up from their sleep and began to tell about all the miracles which the saint had performed "and how it was through God that he had played the fool"¹⁶⁶.

From the falling asleep of St. Symeon we can see the following things:

First, that there is also a way to true freedom in not always looking after our rights in life. There is the path of disclaiming all rights for the sake of God's love and His glory. As his biographer says, the saint, by his foolishness for God, did away with worldly wisdom and prudence. The life of a Christian should be hidden from the sight of men. The more hidden it is, the more glory it has.

Secondly, that unfortunately the world has no criteria for recognising a saint. The society in which the saint lived

165. PG 93, 1744

166. PG 93, 1744-1745

was a society of superficiality and external acts. This explains why God sent him to play the fool. He could not help in any other way. Neither the miracles nor the words of revelation made the people recognise Him. If they had had God's spirit they would have been able to recognise the saint.

Thirdly, God undertakes to glorify the man who is hidden. And when God undertakes to glorify a man, the glory is great. His biographer writes the following wonderful things at the end: "Symeon, who was called the Fool for Christ and lived an angelic and amazing life on earth, died on the twenty-first of July, having shone greatly in his godly achievements and astonishing even the supracosmic bodiless powers by his virtues. He now stands beside the unapproachable throne of God the Father of lights and with boldness glorifies Him in unceasing hymns along with all the heavenly powers"¹⁶⁷.

The death of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ was similar. I would like to give a brief account in order for us to see his way of life as well, because the way in which a person dies manifests his way of life.

St. Andrew foresaw his death and revealed it to his disciple Epiphaneios: "My dear child, this is our last talk together. You will not see me again either living or dead, except in the spirit"¹⁶⁸. Then he revealed to him that after his father's death he would become a monk, that he would distinguish himself as a pastor of the Church and a confessor in the Name of Christ. And after giving him various pieces of advice he asked him to kneel with him and pray to God with him. He prayed for the forgiveness of all that he had done and for his spiritual child Epiphaneios.

167. PG 93, 1748

168. PG 111, 884

After the prayer "he kissed his eyes, and his face, and his chest and his hands and, after praying that he be in peace, departed, leaving him alone in the room to weep bitterly"¹⁶⁹. This was the moment of parting. It manifests the freedom of morality, because he had previously lived the morality of freedom, he lived the freedom of the spirit.

The saint also chose the place where he wished to die. He went to the area where people walk the streets, where prostitutes live, and prayed all night for those in dangers and afflictions and needs, and in captivity, and for the whole world. Then he lay down and, seeing the angels and all the saints who had come close to him as friends, with a smiling face he surrendered his spirit"¹⁷⁰. He died praying for the whole world. Although he was lying in a place inhabited by sinners, nevertheless this spot became a gathering place of saints, when the saints were present at his falling asleep. Thus he surrendered his spirit "with a smiling face", which indicates the overcoming of death.

As the saint fell asleep in glory, there came a fragrance of myrrh and incenses so strongly that one prostitute was searching for the source of it. "There at last she found the saint's fragrant body, with myrrh pouring from it"¹⁷¹. She ran at once to tell the people so that they could see the miracle. When many people came, they smelled the scent of the myrrh, "but were unable to find the body of the Saint at all". And, as St. Andrew's biographer notes, "the Lord, Who saw his hidden achievements, had removed it for reasons known to Him"¹⁷².

The falling asleep of both St. Symeon and St. Andrew, the fools for Christ, makes evident the finding of real free-

169. PG 111, 885-888

171. PG 111, 888

170. PG 111, 888

172. PG 111, 888

dom. Freedom is really man's union and communion with God, liberation of his nous from logic, passions and the conventions of his surroundings and results in the transcendence of death. The acts of the fools for Christ have to be interpreted in this light. If we do not look at them in this spiritual atmosphere, we do an injustice to them, and of course also do an injustice to foolishness for Christ.

e) Christian life and foolishness

The life of the fools for Christ was a perfect one, perhaps also an extreme application of foolishness for Christ which is the quintessence of the whole spirit of the Gospel. Not all, of course, can act the fool for Christ, as we have seen before, because this is a special gift and a special blessing from God, but all can live foolishness for Christ in a more moderate form and a corresponding adaptation. And this can be understood from the fact that the Church's life, a life of love, faith, self-control, aims at and is inspired by a different way, one which is clearly contrary to the ways in which men are living. All this life in the Church is hard to understand for the people who are centred on reason and the senses. The Christian life, without doing away with reason and the senses, moves beyond them.

The Apostle Paul sends word to the Corinthians: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3, 18-19). A person must transcend all the social structures, all the conventional morality of this world, in order to become truly wise. The Christian life is a scandal and foolishness to the Jews and Greeks of every epoch. The Apostle Paul is clear at this point as well: "For

Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1, 22-25). The Christians have been presented in history as the third race. They are neither Jews nor Greeks, but the "new creation". And this did indeed create enormous problems in the established order of that time.

The apostolic life was a kind of foolishness, and this is why the Apostles faced persecutions and deaths, as did every genuine disciple of Christ. The Apostle Paul said: "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 4, 10). Moreover, they even called Christ the fool: "They said, 'He is out of His mind'. And the scribes and those who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebub', and 'By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons'" (Mark 3, 21-22). In another case they said: "He has a demon and is mad" (John 10, 20). The title of the fool was also given to the Apostle Paul. Festus cried out: "Paul, you are beside yourself". And the Apostle replied: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason" (Acts 26, 24-25). Actually in a society which lives by intemperance and falsehood the words of truth and reason are mad. Thus the whole Christian life, the new life which Christ brought to the world, is a folly for the society ruled by reason and the senses. The fools for Christ, who received their particular gift from God, lived this truth of the Church in an extreme form, because they were doing everything to conceal their virtue, to escape honour from the people, and to correct them in odd ways, just because they had distorted the Christian life. Actually, in order for a society that has become

worldly to be awakened from the lethargy and speechlessness into which it has fallen, peculiar methods are needed.

The holy Fathers of the Church move within this framework. Athanasius the Great writes: "He who wants to save himself makes himself mad in this world so that he may be called wise by God". The men of the world spend all their energy buying and selling and taking advantage of their neighbour and depriving him of his goods. But this is foolishness. God "wants us to be fools in earthly things, and wise people in heavenly things"¹⁷³. All the Apostles lived this life. Therefore St. Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of the Apostle Paul, says that for God's sake he was "homeless, without board, poor, wandering, naked, afflicted with starvation and thirst"¹⁷⁴.

Man is united with Christ through the sacramental and ascetic life. Christ's life becomes one's own life by grace and blessing. What God is in essence man becomes by participation. When he reaches as perfect a union as possible, then he lives another life which is strange to the eyes and senses of this world. His nous fills with divine pleasure which cannot be compared with human pleasures. St. Dionysios the Areopagite writes: "In this way we learn that the transcendent fragrance of the divine Jesus distributes its conceptual gifts over our own noetic powers, filling these with a divine pleasure"¹⁷⁵.

St. Macarios of Egypt describes this divine intoxication which the person feels when he participates in the uncreated grace of God. "His heart is filled with the power of God, and his soul exults in the Lord as a bride with

173. Athanasius the Great EPE vol. 11, p. 176

174. Gregory of Nyssa, Jaeger, V, p. 359-360

175. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, CWS p. 228

the bridegroom". It happens that, when a man prays constantly, "suddenly the inner man is caught up in prayer and plunged into the infinite depths of that other world with great sweetness. His whole nous as a result is lifted up and caught up in that region where he sojourns. In that time his thoughts of earthly cares recede into oblivion because now his thoughts are filled and held captivated by divine and heavenly things..."¹⁷⁶. In this state the man transcends everything that is earthly and human without scorning them, precisely because his inner being has been filled with superterrestrial states. Thus he experiences freedom in Christ, and the people of his time cannot understand him.

It is a matter of a sober intoxication. St. Macarios of Egypt again teaches: Those who have been deemed worthy to become children of God and to be reborn from above, always have Christ within them giving them rest and guiding them. But they receive the grace of God in various ways. Sometimes they feel as if they were at a royal banquet. At other times they feel like the bride who enjoys conjugal union with her bridegroom. At other times they feel like incorporeal angels and "sometimes they are as if they have become intoxicated with a strong drink. They delight in the Spirit, being inebriated, namely, by the intoxication of the divine and spiritual mysteries"¹⁷⁷.

St. Isaac the Syrian describes for us the state of the man who experiences "sober intoxication". As a man who drinks wine and becomes inebriated at the time of mourning forgets all the pangs of his sorrow, so the man who is drunk with the love of God in this world, which is a house of lamentation, forgets his sorrows and afflictions "and be-

176. Homily 8,1. CWS p. 81

177. Homily 18,7. CWS p. 14

comes insensible to all sinful passions through his inebriation"¹⁷⁸.

This life of the Church cannot be comprehended and perceived by people who have learned to live conventionally, by external rules of behaviour. And not only can it not be comprehended, but it seems senseless as well. The people who have such experiences are called fools, weird, antisocial. That is why the whole Christian life, if one wants to live it in its fullness, is a life which consists of foolishness for Christ.

Man's salvation does not come about by easy solutions and negotiable methods. Unselfishness and sacrifice are required. Abba Or maintains: "If you are fleeing, flee from men; or the world and the men in it will make you do many foolish things"¹⁷⁹. Thus, a man will either live in the desert for the glory of God, or he will live in society and play the fool. This means that one cannot and should not attach significance to many of the expressions, appraisals and thoughts of men. One can expect to be deprived of rights, slandered and scorned. Continual demanding of our rights leads to enslavement to the mentality and thinking of the world. Liberation also from these rights leads us to the real freedom.

The fools for Christ were also leading to such a freedom. They were leading to freedom from the environment. Of course, as we explained before, they themselves had experienced their personal existential freedom, because they had become dwelling-places of the Living Trinitarian God.

178. Ascetical homilies. Homily 74, p. 363

179. The sayings of the desert fathers, p. 207,14

This was the life of St. Symeon. As his biographer says: "This is his truly hidden and heavenly path, which, while no one saw it, was suddenly made manifest to all"¹⁸⁰.

In concluding the reference to the fools for Christ, I would like to mention St. John's reply to someone from Emesa who visited him for advice: "As you have Abba Symeon, the so-called Fool, why do you ask poor me? Both I and the whole world are in need of his prayers"¹⁸¹.

Truly the whole world and the writer have need of the prayers of those who were fools according to the world, but sound and wise according to God, of those who gave up everything and even the "wealth" of their minds for the love of Christ, of those who attained true freedom, of those who turned out to be children of God, of those who experienced the true freedom of the Spirit.

This foolishness in God can cure the irrational and unreasonable foolishness of the world.

5. Conclusion

In the Church, when we speak of freedom we do not mean it in the moral sense, simply as a choice between good and evil, but we mean it theologically. Freedom is linked very closely with the person's rebirth and his union with God. When, by grace, a person becomes uncreated, without beginning, and without genealogy, he attains real freedom, he is made free. This is also linked with what we said before, that he is freed from the domination of the devil, death, and the passions. His nous is freed from the power of reason, the passions and the environment. This presupposes a hard and unrelenting struggle.

180. PG 93, 1745

181. PG 93, 1729

Theoleptus, bishop of Philadelphia, writes: "When you have quelled both external and inner distraction, your nous will rise to spiritual labour and spiritual discourse". And then he says: "To give free rein to the senses is to shackle the soul; to shackle the senses is to liberate it"¹⁸². If anyone leaves his senses free, his soul is fettered and enslaved. And when anyone fetters his senses, by means of the whole hesychastic method which our Church has, his soul attains freedom, the nous is brought to light and he becomes a real man, a person. Apart from the hesychastic method, as the Fathers of the Church describe it, it is impossible to become a person.

But this presupposes a tuning of our life towards foolishness for Christ. The fools for Christ show the path of finding real freedom, the path of finding the real person. Correspondingly, we must tune ourselves to this level and to this measure. Let us not interest ourselves in what opinion the world has, but in God's opinion. The love of God is a divine intoxication. And this "sober intoxication" is eros. This divine eros is life in fact.

182. Philokalia vol. 4, p. 179

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